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# ILVERTON RECTORY;

OR,

## THE NON-CONFORMISTS

IN

### THE 17TH CENTURY.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

*Montague, Mrs. S. T.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF ALLAN CAMERON, OUR VILLAGE  
IN WAR TIME, ETC.



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1837

V

## Iilverton Rectory.

“Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush, the days of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave.\* \* \* \* The government had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the anathema-maranatha of every fawning dean.”

MACAULEY.

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# ILVERTON RECTORY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE RECTORY AND ITS INMATES.

THERE was not throughout England, in “the olden time,” a pleasanter spot than the rectory of Ilverton, situated in one of the beautiful valleys through which the Severn winds its way, lingering in innumerable curves, as if loath to leave the scenery it enriches and adorns. The house was built on a gentle eminence, overlooking on one side the little village nestled in a bend of the stream, and surrounded with verdant meadows and cultivated fields, divided by thorn hedges; and on the other, the blue mountains of

Wales, visible in the distance, framing a picture charming as a poet's dream of Arcadia.

The house was a low Gothic cottage, with quaint gables and wide mullioned windows, over which climbing roses and flowering vines had been trained, and the trelliswork of the deep porch was covered with ivy and jasmine, filling the air with fragrance. In front of the building, a velvet lawn, studded with magnificent oaks and elms, sloped down to the road, from which it was separated by a broad ha-ha, or concealed bank. On one side of the house was the neatly kept garden and fruit orchard; and on the other, a grove of evergreens surrounded a miniature pond, in which were gold and silver fish, the special pets of the younger members of the household.

The parlor or family room of the rectory was a large and pleasant apartment,

with windows on two sides, opening upon a balcony, and presenting in its general aspect a scene of simple elegance and homelike comfort, which bespoke at once the character of its inhabitants. Nothing could be more unpretending than its furniture; and yet an air of refinement and taste pervaded the room, no less from the extreme nicety and order with which it was kept, than from the drawings, books, and work scattered about it.

A harpsichord, evidently of great age, but in perfect preservation, adorned one side of the room, and a cumbrous sofa, covered with rich but faded damask, occupied the other. Bouquets of fresh flowers, artistically arranged, were placed in antique glasses on the table and beaufet, and various kinds of toys and tiny articles of apparel gave to the whole a charm which childhood alone can impart.

In this room, at the close of a sum-

mer's day, were seated two individuals, enjoying the coolness of the evening breeze as it stole through the open casement, laden with a thousand sweets from the neighboring orchard and garden. The elder of the two was a woman in the prime of life, with a noble and dignified aspect, and an expression of determination on her brow which might have passed for sternness, had it not been contradicted by the sweetness of the mouth, round which the loves and graces alone seemed fitted to linger. A few silver threads mingled with the brown tresses, carefully banded back from the broad, open forehead ; but time had as yet stolen no charm which was not more than replaced by the stately serenity and matronly grace of her manners.

Her eyes were bent with fond and anxious scrutiny on the fair young girl seated at her feet, who was one to call



forth all a mother's love, mingled it might be with a mother's apprehension. She was just eighteen, that lovely age when the thoughtless joyousness of the child gives place to the deeper but more troubled happiness of the woman; when the sweet buds of life's spring are bursting into flower, and we inhale their fragrance with delight, while we tremble at the thought that the frosts of misfortune and sorrow may so soon wither them. The maiden was

“Not learned, save in gracious household ways;  
 Not perfect—nay, but full of tender wants;  
 No angel, but a dearer being, dipped  
 In angel instincts, breathing paradise,  
 Who looked all native to her place, and yet  
 On tiptoe seemed to touch a higher sphere,  
 Too high to tread; and other minds perforce  
 Swayed to her from their orbits as she moved,  
 And girdled her with music.”

Though not perhaps critically beautiful, there was a nameless charm in the face of Annie Leigh, which at once attracted

the eye and interested the heart—something dearer than beauty in the expression of purity, innocence, and gentleness which pervaded her features, and looked through her eyes of violet blue, those deep, unfathomable eyes, “with down-falling eyelids full of dreams and gentle fancies,” which were now fixed earnestly upon her mother, as with hands folded across her knee she waited the continuance of a conversation, evidently of deep interest to both.

“Annie, my child,” at length said the matron, passing her hand fondly over the ringlets of sunny brown which shaded the girl’s drooping face, “I have read your heart like an open book, from your infancy to the present moment. Is there aught in it now that a mother may not see? Do you love this youth, this Master Clarence Brent?”

“Dearest mother!” was the only spo-

ken reply; but those eloquent eyes, upraised for an instant, and that cheek glowing like the heart of a blush-rose, were sufficiently expressive; and a deep sigh from the mother told that she was answered.

“And does he love you? I would fain hope that the affections of my child have not been given unsought.”

“He has told me so, and I could not help believing him,” murmured the girl almost inaudibly.

“It grieves me to give you pain, my darling, but have you ever reflected on the probable issue of such an attachment? Have you remembered the great disparity of rank between you, and the improbability that Sir Richard Brent, so proud and wealthy, will consent to the union of his only son, and the heir of his immense possessions, with the portionless daughter of a country clergyman?”

“I have said so to Clarence, dear mother, many times; but he answered that I was foolishly humble—that a learned and eloquent minister like my father was second to no man in the realm, with many other foolish things which I cannot repeat to you;” and the blushing girl looked up into her mother’s face with an arch smile as she inquired,

“But is there in truth such great disparity between us? I am sure my father is inferior to no one; and I have heard that my grandfather Bradshaw was the son of a baronet.”

“And yet he gave his daughter to a poor clergyman, you would say, my Annie. It was even so; but my father was a friend of the noble Cromwell, and had learned the vanity of earthly distinctions in a school very different from that in which Sir Richard has been trained. But where is this youth who seeks to

win our household treasure? Why comes he not as formerly to the rectory?"

"Know you not, dear mother, that he has gone from England, since leaving the university, to travel over the countries of Europe in company with his tutor? He will be back in little more than a year, and then he says—" A deep blush finished the sentence, and the mother smiled as she replied,

"Well, love, it is the privilege of youth to believe all things, and too often disappointment, like a shadow, follows the steps of expectation. But I hear the voice of your father. To him we will refer the matter, and in this, as in all things else, be guided by his superior wisdom."

Annie rose hastily and advanced to meet her father, who with unwonted gravity merely bent to imprint a kiss on her fair forehead, and then, with an affec-



tionate salutation to his wife, seated himself abstractedly by her side.

Mr. Leigh was a man of commanding presence, rather past middle age, though the furrows on his pale cheek were traced there less by the hand of time than the studious and thoughtful life he had led, together with his habitual concern for the spiritual interests of those committed to his charge. The raven locks which encircled his brow were wholly unfrosted by time, and the whole contour of his head and face bespoke a character of elevated tone, expansive benevolence, and unconquerable energy. For nearly twenty years he had held the living of Ilverton, and through his faithful labors the moral wilderness had been made to blossom as the rose; while by his flock, to whom he was a father as well as pastor, he was revered almost as a superior being.



No wonder, with these high qualities of heart and mind, united with endearing gentleness of character, the good minister was an object of ardent affection to every member of his happy household, from the devoted wife to the little Rose,

“Who climbed his knee the envied kiss to share.”

No wonder that his appearance was hailed with delight by the mother and daughter, whose veneration for his intellectual greatness was tempered by implicit confidence in his goodness and affection.

A glad smile lighted up the face of the wife as she welcomed him to her side, saying,

“Dearest, you have been long in coming to-night. Surely it is not your wont to stay away from us at this sweet hour, when every thing invites to relaxation and repose. I shall be jealous of the books and studies which engross so much of the time I have been accustomed to

call my own. But you are thoughtful and sad. Has aught occurred to annoy or distress you?" she anxiously inquired as she saw that no answering smile on that beloved countenance met hers.

Ere he could reply, a beautiful child of four or five summers came dancing in, her golden hair flying in the breeze, and her complexion, fair as alabaster, glowing with the roseate hues of health and joy.

"See, mamma," she exclaimed, opening the little hands which had been closely clasped—"see this darling little thin bird. It was flying about on the flowers, and it was so pretty I brought it to you."

Alas, the frail butterfly was crushed in the grasp of the child, and of all its brilliant colors nothing remained but a little fine and almost impalpable dust.

"Where is it?" inquired the wonder-

ing child—"where is my little bird, mamma?"

"It was a butterfly, my love, not a bird, and my Rose in bringing it to her mother has killed it by holding it too tightly."

"Killed it! killed my poor little bird! Oh, sister, I'm so sorry;" and hiding her face in her sister's lap, she burst into a passion of tears.

Absorbed as Mr. Leigh had been in his own sad thoughts, he could not look unmoved on the sorrows of the household pet.

"Come hither, my child;" and as the little Rose ran to him and raised her tear-stained face to his, he said tenderly,

"You have only done, my darling, what we are all doing constantly, seizing pleasure so eagerly that it must needs perish in the using. Your poor butterfly would have lived but a few days at

farthest; but our heavenly Father gave it life, and we have no right to take away the gift."

"Can't you mend it, papa? Please put it together again for Rose;" and the child held up her little hand with the remains of the insect still clinging to it.

Kissing fondly the soft white hand, the father replied, "That is impossible, my child; but God has made many more, and they are flying in the sunshine, where you can see and admire their bright colors; but always remember, my love, that the most beautiful things are often the frailest, and most liable to be injured by hasty or rough usage."

Old nurse Margery now appeared, and leading away the child, Mrs. Leigh said to her husband, while a nameless fear chilled her heart,

"So long as a merciful Father spares our domestic treasures, we will not com-

plain, even if trials should be sent upon us by the same gracious hand."

There was no reply for a few moments, while the strong man was evidently struggling to repress his emotions; and when at length he spoke, his tone was calm though tremulous, and the deep solemnity of his manner sent a sharp thrill of apprehension to the hearts of his companions.

"God is my witness, beloved ones," he said, "that if hitherto I have kept the troubles of my own soul from you, it was not from a desire to avoid the cross, but only that you might be spared the pangs of suspense which I have borne. Now, since the path of duty hath been made plain to me, I may no longer shun to declare to you tidings which must be painful to the flesh, albeit the spirit may be strengthened from above to bear it.

"Know then that the ACT OF UNI-



FORMITY, passed by the Parliament, and sanctioned by our sovereign king Charles the Second, hath been sent throughout the land, enjoining upon all ministers of the gospel their unfeigned consent to the requisitions of the late convocation, on pain of ejectment from their livings and suspension from the ministry. The execution of this act is fixed on St. Bartholomew's day, the 24th of August next, (1662.) I have received a copy of the act, and unless prepared by unreserved conformity to avert the blow, the setting sun of that day must see us homeless, penniless wanderers on the face of the earth—you, my true-hearted wife, this dear and dutiful child, and the darling cherub who knows so little of care or sorrow."

"Is there no hope, dear father, no middle course by which, with a clear conscience, you may avoid these terrible consequences?"



“Oh, my child, think you that with such a doom before me I have not striven to avert the blow? Night and day, on my knees before God, with fasting and prayer, I have revolved the subject, and sought to reconcile my interest and my duty, but it may not be. I cannot do evil that good may come, nor commit this great sin against my God and the dictates of my own conscience. I have therefore surrendered myself, my ministry, my people, my place, my wife and children, with whatsoever else is concerned, into His hands from whom I received them, and in silence await his holy will concerning me.

“And now, dear and faithful wife, companion of my joys and sorrows, tell me, have I judged rightly in this matter?”

While her husband was speaking, Mrs. Leigh sat with features pale and rigid as

marble, and slowly dilating eyes fixed immovably upon him, as though the tidings were indeed turning her to stone. But at the sound of that loving voice appealing to her heart, at the touch of that warm hand in which her own had been clasped at the altar, the chilled pulses resumed their play, the tension of the nerves gradually gave way, and her excited feelings found vent in salutary tears. When she spoke, though her words came slowly and gaspingly, her heart was strong with a courage not of this world, and the light of faith was in her eye as she answered,

“God forbid, my beloved husband, that you should hesitate or refuse to follow the dictates of conscience, at whatever sacrifice. He who sent the ravens to feed Elijah will doubtless take thought for us.”

“Worthy daughter of the noble Brad-

shaw," exclaimed the agitated pastor, "how thy high-hearted courage shames my hesitation and unbelief! Yes, I will no longer doubt that He who hath required the sacrifice will strengthen us in the hour of trial. But alas," he added, rising hastily and pacing the room with disordered steps, "to flesh and blood it is a bitter cup which God giveth us to drink. To bid farewell to this dear and pleasant home—the home to which I brought thee, my Lucy, a young and lovely bride—the birthplace of our children, endeared to us by a thousand sweet memories and hallowed associations—to exchange all this for abject poverty; to be driven away from my precious flock; to leave untended this vine of the Lord's planting, now so fair and flourishing—this is a trial which pierces almost to the dividing asunder of flesh and spirit."

"My father, shall we receive good at

the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" said a soft voice at his side; and as he turned at the sound, Annie linked her arm in that of her father, and looked up into his troubled face with an expression of pity and tenderness, such as an angel might wear in contemplating the sufferings of fallen humanity. "I am a child, and know less than nothing in comparison with you, dear father, but you have always taught me that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us, if we remain faithful unto the end."

"Bless thee, my darling; God speaks to me through those young lips, and I will thank him and take courage. But how is this, my daughter? thou comfortest thy father, while the deadly pallor of thine own cheek betrays the anguish thou wouldst fain conceal."

Ah, little did the good man dream of the extent of that more than mortal anguish. The blow that had almost crushed the life out of her young heart had fallen so suddenly, so unexpectedly ; for it was only a few days before, that her lover, who was leaving for Europe, assured her that as soon as he returned he should publicly urge his suit, and entreat her parents to bestow upon him the treasure he coveted so fondly. Now they were separated for ever. She felt and knew it ; for if a doubt existed of Sir Richard Brent's willingness to receive her as the bride of his son while her father was a beneficed clergyman of the English church, what hope could there be for her now, as the daughter of an ejected, beggared non-conformist ? Not for worlds would she have her father do violence to his own convictions, or betray the sacred cause of liberty, civil and religious,



which from her cradle she had been taught to revere ; but the conflict of feeling had exhausted her energies, and well might her father remark the death-like paleness of her cheek, for while he was yet speaking, she sank like a snow-wreath from his encircling arm, and was carried to her own room in a state of insensibility.

“Leave her to me,” said her mother gently ; “her strength has been sorely tried, and though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. Fear not for us,” she added with a faint attempt to smile, as his look of anxious love smote upon her heart : “with health, unbroken affection, and confidence in God, what more can we desire?”

When on coming to herself Annie found no one with her but her mother, she threw her arms round the neck of that dear comforter, and wept long and bitterly. At length, raising her head



from the resting-place of her infancy, she said more calmly,

“Pardon, dearest mother, this selfish indulgence of grief: I have so loved Clarence, and I know how keenly he will feel the blow, for in spite of my unworthiness, he loves me well and dearly. But my short dream of bliss is over, and henceforth it shall be to me but as a vision of the night, from which on awaking we turn away to the sterner duties and realities of the day. There is enough to live for while my parents and sister are left to me, and no vain repinings shall add to the weight of the burden imposed on you. One thing only I entreat, by all the love you have ever shown me—that this unhappy attachment may not be revealed to my father, lest in the knowledge of his child’s unhappiness he should have sorrow upon sorrow. Strength will be given me to conquer

an earthly love, and to fix my whole heart where it may cling for ever without fear of separation."

From that day to the dreaded period of ejection, the young Annie moved among her friends like an embodied spirit of love and hope. Deeply she felt the value of all she was about to lose, but like her parents she had counted the cost; and though the pale and tearful faces, the subdued voices and hushed tread of the little group spoke the presence of a great sorrow, there was no clamorous grief, no selfish lamentation. Clouds and darkness were round about them; but even then, to the eye of faith, the bow of promise shone through the gloom, a sure pledge that the Sun of righteousness was shining behind the cloud, and in his own time would pour sunshine and gladness round their onward way.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE STORM GATHERING.

CHARLES STUART, the second of that name, had recently been brought back from exile and poverty, and placed upon the throne from which his father was ignominiously hurled to meet his fate upon a scaffold. Trained from his early youth in the school of adversity, it was hoped and believed by the English people, that the young king would avoid the errors which had destroyed his father, and uniting in himself the different factions which divided the commonwealth, would govern the nation with a just and impartial sway.

But the doomed house of Stuart seem ever to have been incapable of learning a wise lesson, or unlearning a foolish and

dangerous one. In the midst of peril and suffering, Charles Second had seemed to be a kind, generous, and chivalric prince; but when once established at Whitehall, he was seen to be a soulless profligate, a mere gilded puppet, influenced by any one who would take the trouble to minister to his sensuality, or indulge his selfish indolence. Unlike his brother James, he was naturally averse to severity in matters pertaining to politics or religion, and yet persecution raged in his reign to an extent absolutely appalling. Of that time it may be truly said,

“The good man’s share  
In life was gall and bitterness of soul,  
—————while luxury  
In palaces lay straining her low thought  
To form unreal wants, and heaven-born truth  
And moderation fair wore the red marks  
Of superstition’s scourge.”

Charles was secretly a Roman-catholic, though he dared not avow it, and

hence he would gladly have tolerated the Presbyterians and Independents, whom he despised, in order to extend the same boon to the members of the church of Rome. But the Prelatist and Romish party could not forgive those who had humbled them during the civil war and under the Commonwealth, and when their turn of ascendancy came, were resolved to put down what they termed schism by the strong hand of power. They were not long in bringing the selfish and indolent king to sanction their purpose.

The vices which characterized the period of the Restoration were precisely those least tolerated by the Puritans. They loathed the painted, furbelowed licentiousness that disgraced the court and its anointed head. They openly condemned the light literature and dramatic entertainments of the age, stained



as both were with unblushing immorality and the grossest profligacy.

But let it not be thought that the Puritans were destitute of culture and refinement, because they were so occupied with the great realities of time and eternity, that they had little leisure for artistic culture and the graces of oratory. The sect that could boast among its members a Harrington, a Marvel, a Wallace, a Withers, who says of his muse,

“By the murmur of a spring,  
By the least bough’s rustleing,  
By a daisy, whose leaves spread,  
Shut when Titan goes to bed,  
Or a shady bush or tree,  
She could more infuse in me  
Than all nature’s beauties can  
In some other, wiser man;”

and above all, a Milton, the splendor of whose genius places him above all rivalry but that of Shakspeare: such a sect need not be careful to vindicate its name from the reproach of barbarism.



If the Puritans cared little for the mythical heroes of the Greek and Roman poets, they were familiar with the sublime topics and gorgeous imagery of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and felt that in resisting tyrants and defending civil and religious liberty, they were acting a grander epic than the world had ever yet seen. If they shunned and hated the drama, disfigured as it was with moral leprosy, they knew that they were themselves a spectacle to angels and men, surrounded by an innumerable company of witnesses, while Jehovah himself waited to award the prize.

Such men could not basely truckle to unholy power, or wear a mask to avoid the temporal consequences of their unpopular doctrines; and thus exposed, they were soon made to feel that by the death of their great protector Cromwell, they had lost all that stood between

them and the utmost wrath of their enemies.

A convocation or assembly of the clergy was called, and by this body various revisions were made and laws enacted, which seemed only designed to exasperate the Puritans. The Dissenters as a body disliked the saints' days; the revisions added to the number of those days. They would not use the Apocryphal lessons; the revisions added to those already in use the story of Bel and the Dragon. Having finished their work, the houses of convocation adjourned; but the Parliament met, and sanctioned what they had done by passing the famous Act of Uniformity.

By this law, all clergymen were required to signify publicly their cordial and unfeigned assent and consent to all the requisitions of that act; to repudiate the solemn league and covenant—an agree-

ment which had been entered into several years before by the Scotch Presbyterians and the English Independents or Dissenters, for the preservation of religious and civil liberty in both kingdoms—and to acknowledge no obligation to the same; and further, to declare that it was unlawful, under any circumstances or pretexts whatever, to take up arms against the king.

Thus they were compelled to disavow and reject most solemnly all the great principles for which they and their fathers had fought and bled under the preceding reign, and to accept thankfully a spiritual domination far more intolerable than that thrown off by Cromwell and his associates. It was not matters of secondary importance—an observance, a lesson, or even an act of despotism whose effects might be temporary, that they felt called upon to resist. They were contending

for principles whose unchecked violation might result in darkness and spiritual bondage. They were loyal subjects, and would gladly have obeyed the king in all things where conscience was not concerned; but the party which, since the time of Laud, had been stealthily endeavoring to graft the principles of Romanism on the Protestant church, were resolved to insist on absolute conformity, or ejection and beggary as the alternative.

Under these circumstances, what could the Puritan clergymen do? They were studious, highly educated men, accustomed to a life of respectability and comfort, and they dearly loved the families whose temporal interests all hung upon their decision, and who by non-conformity would be reduced from competency to abject poverty. As they looked round on their pleasant homes, and saw their unconscious children sporting in the gar-



dens or groves, ignorant of the pang which rent their hearts, how difficult is it for us, in this age of toleration, even to imagine the conflicts experienced by those devoted men, while day by day the conviction settled down upon their souls, of the impossibility of subscribing to that which they abhorred, for the sake of earthly ease and emolument.

Who can adequately portray the solicitude with which they revolved the question whether they could by any means obey the requisition of Parliament, and yet continue with the flocks over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers; and as they were compelled to answer the inquiry in the negative, no eye but that of God witnessed the anguish which swept over their souls as they looked into the dark future, where nothing but the lowest menial labor stood between them and absolute starvation. It

was not in their own persons only they were about to suffer. When called on to give the important answer that was to seal their fate, they knew that every member of the household would share the bitter cup of persecution.

By a refinement of cruelty worthy of Laud or Jeffreys, the non-conformist minister was forbidden to reside in, or even to approach within five miles of any corporate town, or to exercise the vocation of teacher or preceptor in any way whatever. There remained then no resource for those refined and gifted men, the pupils and friends of Owen and Howe and Baxter and Charnock, men of whom the world was not worthy, but day-labor in the rural districts where alone they were permitted to reside.

Some there were among their number, who, like Pliable in Bunyan's immortal



allegory, were willing to become all things to all men, in a sense very different from that intended by the apostle. They had been Prelatists under the first Charles, Presbyterians in the time of the Long Parliament, Independents under Cromwell, and were now ready to become Conformists under the second Charles. One such, meeting a brother who had been ejected for non-conformity, taunted him with the poverty of his threadbare coat.

“Yes,” replied the good man, “I know it is old and worn; but one thing I can say for the coat, *it has never been turned.*”

Another excellent man, when asked how he would support his family, consisting of a wife and ten children, answered, “They must depend on the bank of faith, described in the sixth chapter of Matthew.”

“I know,” said the great and good Dr. Bates in his farewell sermon, “I know you will expect me to say something as

to my non-conformity. I shall only say this much ; it is neither fancy, faction, nor ill-humor that makes me not to subscribe, but merely for the fear of offending God. And if after the best means used for my illumination, as prayer to God, discourse, or study, I am not able to be satisfied of the lawfulness of what is required—if it be my unhappiness to be in an error, surely man may have no reason to be angry with me in this world, and I humbly hope God will pardon me in the next.”

Another good man, Mr. Atkin, remarks in answer to the charge of disaffection :

“Let him never be accounted a sound Christian, who doth not fear God and honor the king. I beg that you will not interpret our non-conformity into an act of disloyalty towards the king. We will do any thing for his majesty but sin.

We will hazard any thing for him but our souls. We hope we could die for him, but we are not willing to be damned for him. We make no question, however we may be accounted of here, that we shall be found loyal and obedient subjects at our appearance before the tribunal of God."

The rector of Ilverton had received a copy of the Act of Uniformity soon after its passage by Parliament. Day after day, alone in his study, with his Bible and his God, he pondered the subject. With no one near him, the path of duty seemed so plain that the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein; but when he met the wife and children whose interests were bound up with his own, he was often conscious of an intense desire to find some middle course between conformity and absolute beggary.

The struggle, though severe, could not, in a mind constituted like his, be of long

continuance. The Saviour has said, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine," and as it was the first wish of Mr. Leigh's heart, to do the will of his divine Master, he was not left in doubt as to the course he ought to pursue in such an exigency. He could not, where principle was concerned, consult expediency rather than right, and however fearful the consequences of a refusal might be, it was impossible to subscribe *ex animo*, to all the requisitions of the Act of Uniformity.

While a doubt remained upon his mind in reference to his future course, nothing was said by him to Mrs. Leigh of the trial through which he was passing; for though he knew her to be a sincere and earnest disciple of Jesus, she was also a devoted wife and mother, and the flesh might well shrink from such a sacrifice as that which lay before them. As soon however as

his duty was made clear, he sought those whom his decision most concerned, with the result already stated. But though a terrible weight was lifted from his heart by the meek and cheerful submission of those beloved beings, he could not help continually asking himself, as he saw them moving through the pleasant rooms of the rectory, or among its cool and shady grounds, "How can they, so delicately nurtured, and accustomed to ease and refinement, face the coarse and hard realities of the life that lies before them?"

Old nurse Margery, who had accompanied her dear young lady to Ilverton on her first coming there as a bride, and who had been the faithful nurse of Annie and Rose, would not listen for an instant to the proposition of leaving them for a home of her own, as she had saved enough to support her in her old age.



“No, no,” was her reply. “I have eaten of your bread and drank of your cup in prosperity all these years, and I am not going to turn my back on my best friends in their trouble, when my mistress will need old Margery more than ever. Besides I am too old to look up a new home and new people now, and nobody can ever seem to me like the children I have cared for so many years. I have enough laid up to supply all my needs, and shall want no wages or bounty, but it would break my heart to say good-bye to my children and my dear good lady.”

“Say no more, my kind Margery,” replied Mrs. Leigh, “we will not send away such a friend, when so few remain to us. I thank God, and next to him, I thank you, for the kindness which prompts your offer, and accept it as an earnest that we are not utterly forsaken. We go



out from this endeared home, not knowing whither the Lord will lead us; but since it is impossible to go where He is not, we will have no fear. He who sent manna from heaven in the desert, and gave water from the flinty rock to his fainting people, will not now leave those who trust in him to want for any good thing."

## CHAPTER III.

## WINSTON PARK.

ABOUT fifteen miles to the north of the parish of Ilverton, lay Winston Park, the splendid manorial residence of Sir Richard Brent, who, by his marriage with Jacqueline, daughter and heiress of Lord Scrope, had come into possession of a princely heritage in that and the adjoining counties. The house was a modern building, the ancient seat of the family having been burned to the ground by a band of Ireton's troops during the civil war.

It was of great extent, built round a hollow square, the façade of Corinthian architecture, with pillars, pilasters, and entablature of white marble, curiously wrought by workmen brought from Italy for that purpose.

The park was many miles in extent, well stocked with deer, and remarkable for the great size and beauty of the trees, some of which were known to be nearly a thousand years old. Sir Richard would as soon have dreamed of converting the portraits of his ancestors which adorned the picture gallery into firewood, as of cutting down one of those forest monarchs, for any purpose whatever. The porter's lodge, a small cottage covered with honeysuckles and clematis, was situated at the entrance of the grounds, opposite the principal front of the house; and from it a circular carriage drive led up to the grand portico, terminating in an esplanade filled with rare and beautiful exotics.

The interior of the building corresponded in magnificence with its external appearance. There were splendid suites of apartments, with floors of mosaic, hangings of rich tapestry, cabinets and tables

of inlaid work, and rare pictures of the old masters, some of which were invaluable gems of art; but more beautiful than all the rest, was the old chapel, rescued from the flames when the remainder of the building was destroyed, with its windows of stained glass, its illuminated missals and breviaries, and a miniature copy of Ruben's "descent from the cross," carved in ivory by Benvenuto Cellini the great Florentine artist, which was of priceless worth.

The ancestors of Sir Richard had been stanch Catholics for many generations, and though his great grandfather had become a nominal Protestant in the reign of Elizabeth, a strong leaning to Prelacy had always distinguished the family, until the accession of the present baronet to the estate. Sir Richard Brent was a man of the world, vain of his ancient name, of his large estates, his high-born

wife, and above all of his son and heir, the young Clarence; but there was in him little of the material of which bigots are made. Like Gallio, he cared for none of those things about which Churchmen and Puritans differed, and willingly left to his wife the sole charge of the family conscience in all matters pertaining to religion. When not irritated by opposition to any of his cherished plans, the baronet was courteous and kind; a steadfast and generous friend, but an unforgiving and dangerous enemy.

The Lady Jacqueline, who was connected by birth with many of the principal English families, was a proud and overbearing woman, severe in her manners, hardly deigning to unbend even to her only child, who was secretly the idol of her heart. It was rumored and believed by many of her dependents, that Lady Brent was at heart a Catholic, though she out-



wardly conformed to the worship of the Established church. Certain it was, that when at Winston Park, which happened but seldom, there were services in the chapel, at which none of the domestics but her ladyship's own woman were allowed to be present, and strange men of foreign garb and mien were at such times guests in the family, coming and going in her ladyship's train.

Most of her time was spent in London, or at Eversden, a place which she possessed in her own right, and which for some unknown reason she preferred to Winston Park. Surrounded as she usually was by a large and fashionable circle, she had little leisure or inclination for the cultivation of the domestic affections; hence she was almost a stranger to the real character of her son, though he was the one thing on earth most precious in her sight.

And Clarence Brent was in truth well calculated to call forth all the pride and fondness of a mother's heart. Ardent, enthusiastic, and imaginative, gifted with the "too much" in every thing pertaining to the domain of feeling and sensibility, he needed a firm, wise hand to restrain and guide him, to check the exuberance of youthful emotion, and to draw out the energy and strength of purpose latent in his character. Instead of this, he was accustomed, from childhood, to subservience and flattery from all around him; from Sir Richard and Lady Brent to the valet of the young heir, all were his blind and unquestioning worshippers. Nothing but his naturally fine temper saved Clarence from becoming a domestic tyrant; as it was, he only became weary and indifferent to all around him. At school and at the university he took the first stand among his classmates in

scholarship ; but he took it as he did every thing else, without interest and without effort. He had too much refinement of taste, and too just a perception of moral excellence, to find any enjoyment in association with the openly vicious, or to be tempted by low and sensual pleasures ; but he was in great danger of becoming that most useless and hopeless of characters, a moral Sybarite, sunk in effeminacy and sloth, when a casual introduction to the family at the rectory of Ilverton first taught him the wants and capacities of his own nature, and changed the indolent dreamer into an earnest resolute man.

Young Brent had graduated at Oxford with high honors, and was staying at Winston Park alone, while Sir Richard and Lady Brent were on the Continent with a party of friends, expecting to be joined by Clarence as soon as his latest

whim, a desire for solitude, had been gratified by a few days' experience.

It was a lovely morning in early autumn, and after some hours spent in reading, the young man became weary, and with his dog and gun, resolved to spend a part of the day in exploring the country for something new. Since his boyhood he had been but seldom at Winston, and knew nothing of what lay beyond the park, so that the adventure had all the zest of novelty. The scenery was charming, and new beauties were constantly opening before him, drawing him onward, until he found himself far beyond his father's domain, and in a region of which he knew nothing.

He had ascended the side of a deep ravine, and found himself on a spot of table-land, round which the hills formed a fine panorama; while just below him a murmuring brook ran by, giving an air

of quiet beauty to the scene, which might otherwise have seemed lonely and wild. Just as he was about to retrace his steps, he caught sight of a picture which arrested him and chained his attention. A beautiful child with golden hair and eyes of "heaven's own blue," was standing before a young lady, busily engaged in twining wild flowers among the auburn ringlets that hung in such profusion about the face and neck of the fair unknown. When the work was finished, the child stepped back to take a look at the effect, and then seizing the hand of the elder, she exclaimed,

"Oh, it is so pretty, sister. Come to the water, and you can see how sweetly the flowers look in your hair. I did it all myself;" and the child actually danced in the joy and excitement of the moment.

The elder sister rose, and stepping to the brook, bent over it with a smile, dis-







closing to Clarence as she did so a face sweeter than any he had ever yet beheld, even in his dreams. As she spoke, her voice completed the fascination which held him silent and spell-bound, fearing almost to breathe lest the beautiful tableau should dissolve before his eyes.

“Your little fingers have done wonders, darling Rose; but now we must hasten home, or mamma will be anxious. We have wandered further than usual, and must return immediately.”

At that moment Clarence stepped forward, and with a courteous grace peculiarly his own, ventured to address the young stranger.

“I find myself in an unknown region,” he said, “having wandered hither by chance: may I presume to inquire, fair lady, where I am, and whither this path leads?”

Annie Leigh was at first startled at

this sudden appearance of a stranger in a spot so lonely ; but as he was evidently a sportsman, and there was nothing in his manner to excite distrust, she replied,

“You are but a short distance from Ilverton, which lies over the hills yonder, and this path leads directly to the village.”

So saying she took the hand of Rose, and bowing courteously, prepared to leave the place ; but Clarence, who had no disposition to relinquish the adventure, accompanied them, assisting the child, whenever the inequalities of the path retarded their progress. There was about the young man, whenever he was deeply interested, an air of sincerity and kindness, which won the confidence of all with whom he associated. It was not long therefore before the young people were conversing freely ; nay, so far had he gained upon Rose, that when she com-



plained of being tired, she suffered him, with a little pretty coyness and hesitation, to lay aside his gun, and take her on his shoulder. In this way they approached Ilverton; and on reaching the rectory, Annie could not avoid giving the stranger an invitation to enter, which it is unnecessary to say was gladly accepted. Mr. Leigh was absent on a visit to the metropolis; but Annie heard him announce his name and residence to her mother with no small trepidation. It was then the son and heir of the great man of the county with whom she had been so familiarly conversing, and who had yielded to the playful caprices of little Rose as freely as if they had been his equals.

And such he seemed in truth to consider them, or rather to deem the interview a favor accorded to himself, for never before had he made such efforts to



produce a favorable impression as during the hour spent at the rectory that morning. When he returned home, life had acquired a new meaning and interest: he asked not why; he only knew that the family at Ilverton interested him more than any he had ever yet seen.

Various pretexts were found for going again and again, and on every visit he discovered new charms in the lovely and intelligent girl, who differed so greatly from the fashionable ladies he had hitherto met, that she seemed hardly to belong to the same species.

The good rector was still away, and his excellent wife found so much pleasure in the society of the fascinating stranger, that she was not careful to analyze the motives which brought him thither so constantly. She never thought of danger to her beloved child from his visits, until the bright blush which followed

every mention of his name, and the thrill of pleasure which lighted up every feature of her expressive face when he appeared, warned her that the child was now a woman, with all a woman's capacity of loving and suffering.

The husband on whose judgment she had always been accustomed to rely was absent, and she shrank from saying to Clarence that his visits must be discontinued. Another fear was still more embarrassing: should she not compromise the maiden delicacy of her daughter by hinting at the reason for such an announcement?

While she still hesitated, Clarence was summoned to join his parents immediately, and left Winston without any open declaration of the love which had spoken through every look and tone, and which seemed to him to be interwoven with every fibre of his being. He could not

for a moment persuade himself that his haughty mother would sanction such an attachment; but his will had thus far been absolute in the household, and it was impossible, he thought, that now, when his whole happiness was at stake, his feelings and wishes should be disregarded by his parents.

Meantime he was resolved to endeavor to become more worthy of the pure and lovely being who had first awakened his higher nature, and convinced him of the aimless life he had hitherto been pursuing.

He found in his mother's party at Florence, the Lady Alicia Somers, a distant relative of his own, and a fashionable heiress, whom he had once been inclined to admire, but who seemed now, in comparison with the bright image enshrined in his heart, a mere painted butterfly, unworthy a moment's serious

thought. It was not long, however, before he discovered that his mother had a purpose in bringing them together ; and long experience had taught him that her ladyship's purposes were not easily evaded or thwarted. The young couple were constantly thrown together, and matters so arranged, that without positive rudeness, Clarence could not avoid becoming on all occasions the escort of his cousin, who appropriated his attentions as coolly as if he had been her own special property.

He bore this for some time with tolerable patience, hoping that his evident coldness and indifference might be understood. At length, however, seeing no hope of this, his temper gave way, and he resolved to put an end to the annoyance. Accordingly the next time that Lady Alicia was assigned to his care, he declined the honor so pointedly, that the

young lady was very indignant, and complained to her aunt of the alleged insult.

“What is this I hear of you, Clarence?” inquired her ladyship the next day, as the young man entered her room. “Is it possible that my son is capable of offering an insult to a lady, and a young and beautiful one like Lady Alicia Somers? I could not have believed it on any ordinary authority.”

“You may well hesitate to believe the fact, my lady mother, for I assure you I would not wilfully insult the meanest or poorest thing that wears the form of woman. But permit me to ask why I am subjected to this constant martyrdom on account of this young lady? I have not been a free agent since my arrival at Florence. Without any wish of my own, or rather in defiance of my wishes, I find her ladyship always at my side, ready to monopolize my time and attentions, to



the exclusion of all more pleasant engagements, until it has become impossible longer to bear the annoyance. If you hope in this way to bring about a union between the families, let me assure you that nothing could defeat the plan more surely than such a course. Left to myself, I might have liked Lady Alicia as a relative; now I utterly detest her."

"Clarence," said Lady Brent coldly, "spare my nerves, I entreat you, this vulgar exhibition of temper, which nothing can justify or excuse. You are young yet, and know very little about your duties to your family, or to the station you are to occupy in society; but believe me, I know them well, and am not likely to forget them. Certain things are required of you by birth and position. If you choose to term them sacrifices, so let it be, they are none the less necessary; none the less is it true that they

are demanded, and must be conceded by you."

"But, my mother, am I not to be consulted in regard to the disposal of my own affections? Is my happiness or misery nothing in your eyes?"

"Undoubtedly it is; but at your age, one has dreams which on awaking are found to be romantic and impracticable. The time will come when you will look back on the visions of youth with astonishment and contempt."

"May I never live to see that day. I cannot, will not believe the hideous doctrine that all which is best and brightest on earth is only a dream. If it be so, then let me still dream on, and cherish the dear deceit that is so much sweeter than reality. My mother, I believe you love your son; will you not consent to let me be happy in my own way? I do not love Lady Alicia; nay, she is posi-

tively disagreeable to me, and nothing can induce me to degrade myself by acting a lie, in offering her attentions which my heart disavows."

"My son," said Lady Brent haughtily, "you should have been born an actor. This tragic rant would make your fortune on the stage, but it is quite thrown away upon me. I hoped better things of you, I confess. I thought you would be more amenable to reason. But you are the spoiled darling of fortune, and allowance must be made for your caprices. But beware of carrying them too far. There are limits even to parental fondness, and I trust you will be warned in time."

The young man had resolved during this interview to throw himself on his mother's indulgence, and tell her the whole story of his love for Annie Leigh, and the impossibility of giving her up;

but there was something in the chilling repulsion of her manner, which checked the words just springing to his lips, and sent him from her presence hopeless of obtaining the parental sanction to his wishes, but more than ever resolved to seek his own happiness in his own way. Alas for the young man who, in his hour of need, when the passions are all awake and clamoring for gratification, has no mother's heart to which he may turn for sympathy and assistance in the perilous conflict! Alas for such an one when there is nothing in the remembrance of his parents to make him feel that religion is not a fable—that faith, truth, and honor are not mere catchwords to deceive the ignorance and dupe the credulity of the multitude!

In the desperation of the moment, Clarence might have doubted whether there was such a thing as goodness on the

earth, but for the memories of Ilverton rectory, and the lessons of piety and excellence learned from the lips and lives of its inmates. Every thing about him seemed hollow and unsubstantial, mocking him with the semblance of enjoyment, and like the apples of Sodom, turning to ashes in his grasp; but there was one spot, bright as love and hope could paint it, which to his excited imagination was an Eden of bliss, unstained by the corruption of earth.

He detached himself more and more from his mother and her circle, and spent hours every day in wandering about the beautiful Val d'Arno, dreaming of the past and picturing the future, wholly neglecting the duties of the present. Fortunately for him, it was resolved in family conclave that before entering on public life; it was expedient for him to make the tour of Europe and visit its



principal courts; and a gentleman had been already selected by Sir Richard as the companion and mentor of his son during his travels. The same gracious though unknown Providence which had hitherto watched over the young man for good, guided in the choice of this individual; for, unlike the most of domestic tutors in that age, Mr. Watson was a man of integrity and honor, who understood his duties, and sought to fulfil them towards the youth committed to his charge.

Mr. Watson accompanied Clarence to London, where the necessary arrangements were to be made; and from thence they proceeded to Winston Park to transact some business for Sir Richard, which detained them for a week. On the evening after his arrival the young man hastened to the rectory, but found the family all absent. Mr. and Mrs. Leigh were at

the seaside for the health of the latter, while Annie was making a visit of a few days to a friend in a neighboring county.

Every day found him at Ilverton, vainly hoping for her return, until the period fixed for his stay had nearly expired, when, in passing through the wood where he had first met Annie on his way to Ilverton, the unusual sound of merriment met his ear, proceeding from a group of youths and maidens in holiday attire, who were collected round a May-pole in the open space above the ravine. It was May-day, and the young girls of the village had chosen their queen, and were crowning her with appropriate ceremonies, while Annie Leigh, who seemed the presiding genius of the scene, stood at a little distance, enjoying the happiness of those about her.

How beautiful she looked to Clarence

in her robes of simple white, with no other ornament than her wreath of auburn hair, worn untortured by art, and the unconscious grace which dictated and controlled every movement. Never, in the halls of wealth and fashion, had he seen a face and form which seemed to him so perfect a model of womanhood, as it came from the hand of the Creator. For a few moments he gazed unobserved on this central figure of the scene; then advancing towards her, his heart thrilled with delight as he marked the vivid blush and smile which greeted his appearance. He had resolved to say nothing to her of his love until after his return from the Continent; but at this unexpected meeting all his good resolutions took flight, and drawing her aside from the noisy circle round the May-pole, in a few burning words he poured out his heart before her.

Startled and affrighted at his vehemence, the trembling girl could not at first reply; but his assurances of love found an echo in her own heart, and ere she was aware he had drawn from her the confession that it was so. Not until she had reached home, and in the silence of her own apartment recalled the events of the last few hours, was she sensible of her own imprudence in forgetting the barriers which separated her from her lover. But even then hope whispered that Clarence, with his enthusiasm and determination, would surely find some way of overcoming those obstacles. Annie was young, and in her eyes her parents were the first of earthly beings. It was impossible therefore for her to realize that Sir Richard and Lady Brent would regard their son's alliance with the family of the rector a degradation.

Still, in disposing of her own affec-

tions without parental sanction, Annie felt that she had erred; and when Clarence came the next day to Ilverton, he found her wholly unprepared to confirm his hopes, or even to listen to his protestations of affection. In vain he assured her that, with a mother's penetration, Mrs. Leigh must have read his heart, and tacitly approved what she saw there; in vain he declared his conviction that the consent of her own parents would be freely given when, on his return, he could openly claim her for his own.

“I have done very wrong,” was her only reply; “but not even for you, dear Clarence, can I take another step without the knowledge and consent of my father and mother. Something tells me the happiness of which we have dreamed is not for us, and I would not willingly add self-reproach to the bitterness of separation.”



“Bless you for the acknowledgment, dearest, that our separation will be bitter to you. Do not, however, believe for a moment that it will be final. As surely as my life is spared to see England once more, so surely shall we meet again, and in circumstances where I can declare my choice and openly claim this dear hand before the world.”

The next day the young man left Winston, and the utmost boon his eloquence could obtain previous to his departure, was the blushing confession that, were all other obstacles to their union removed, none would exist in her own heart.

The conversation between Annie and her mother, recorded in the first chapter, took place some days after Mrs. Leigh's return to the rectory, and the change of circumstances which then came upon them, seemed to Annie to divide her so

hopelessly from the heir of Sir Richard Brent, that the subject was not mentioned to her father, and her attachment was as truly buried in her own heart as if the grave had already closed over its object.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE DAY OF EJECTION.

SUNDAY, the 24th of August, 1662, called in England Black Bartholomew, in memory of this day, dawned as brightly on the rectory of Ilverton as though happy hearts, instead of breaking ones, welcomed its light. As the family met in the pleasant breakfast-room, it was with quivering lips and blanched cheeks that the morning salutations were exchanged; for all knew that the sun which rose on them in peace and plenty, would, ere its setting, see them reduced to obscurity and pauperism. Annie Leigh, before leaving her own room, had sought strength where alone it was to be found, and her smile, if it had lost something of its former radiance, was full of the soul's

light, as she came in from the garden with a bouquet of fresh flowers for her mother, saying, as she presented them,

“These dear little pensioners on God’s bounty greeted me with such a cheering good-morning, that I could not resist the wish to bring them to you, my mother, that they may gladden your heart as they have mine.”

“Thank you, love; they do indeed teach a sweet lesson. If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more take thought and care for his dependent children?”

The prayer which rose from the family altar that morning, at which the father and pastor officiated, seemed to take hold of the throne of God, as he pleaded with a fervor that could not be denied, for strength and grace to carry him through the trying services of that eventful day.

An immense audience had assembled

in the village church to hear the pastor's solemn farewell, for it was known throughout the town and vicinity, that Mr. Leigh had refused to subscribe, and must therefore leave on the morrow. As the loved and venerated pastor moved slowly up the aisle with sad yet steadfast mien, followed by his family, there were tears in eyes unused to weeping, while in many pews loud sobs testified the affection felt for the inmates of the rectory, and the sorrow occasioned by the thought, that in that hallowed building their faces would be seen no more.

Mr. Leigh took for his text on this occasion the words of Paul to the persecuted Hebrews: "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and more enduring substance." After dwelling at length on the sufferings of the early Christians for conscience' sake,



and the grace of God which supported and comforted them under it all, he closed by saying,

“ And now, dear brethren, members of the flock to which I have so long ministered in the gospel, I know you will expect me to say something of the cause which is about to separate us, and to send me forth in my age houseless and penniless upon the world. Let me tell you this much: it is not obstinacy, nor pride, nor ill-humor which moves me in this matter. I know our enemies will tell you that we are vain and peevish, and would fain all be bishops, with divers other evil things; but the Lord be witness between them and us in this. I could do very much for the love I bear my people; but I dare not sin. Beloved, I prefer my wife and children before a blast of air or the talk of the multitude, and am very sensible of what it is to be

reduced to a morsel of bread. Day and night, with prayer and fasting, I have sought that this cup might pass from me, if so it was possible with a good conscience; but it may not be. I would do or suffer any thing that is right to keep myself in the work of God; but to sin against him and my own soul, I dare not do it. I cannot subscribe to that which I neither believe nor in many things can innocently follow, and therefore must embrace the alternative, silence and beggary. Let the God of heaven and earth do what he will with me and mine; our enemies cannot drive us beyond his gracious presence, and Elijah's God has still the power and will to provide for those who trust him."

With a few words of tender and pathetic exhortation to each member of the assembly, he closed with the apostolic benediction, and bade farewell to the

pulpit from which, for nearly twenty years, he had dispensed the word of life to an attentive and affectionate congregation. The people flocked round him as he came down the aisle, each one eager to obtain a last word or look from one so justly beloved.

A grey-haired old man, whose love for the rector was one of the strongest feelings of his nature, pulled at his gown exclaiming,

“Ah, Mr. Leigh, if we might only get by this evil day, and keep you still for our minister, who knows what God would do for us?”

“It cannot be, my friend, though I would gladly stay with you, if I might do it with a safe conscience.”

“Oh, dear sir,” was the quaint reply, “many nowadays make a great gash in their consciences; couldn’t you just make a little *nick* in yours?”

“Recollect, my brother, we are forbidden to do evil that good may come. I must obey God, whatever may be the consequences.”

The hymns sung at family worship on that last evening in the rectory, were selected by the father with special reference to their peculiar circumstances; and as the sweet, rich voice of Annie gave utterance to the words of faith and trust which have comforted so many suffering children of God, the heart of Mrs. Leigh, which seemed to be bound in fetters of iron, melted within her, and tears like summer showers were falling silently, when little Rose came softly up, and throwing her arms about her mother's neck and laying her soft cheek to hers, whispered,

“What is the matter, dear mamma? Is ‘our Father who art in heaven’ dead, that makes you cry so much?”

“Verily,” exclaimed the pastor, “out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God is reproofing our lack of faith, and teaching us wisdom. Let us remember, dear wife and children, our Father is not dead, nor are his resources diminished. If he marks the cry of the sparrow for food, he will not forget us, for, sinful and weak as we are, he has declared us of more value than many sparrows.”

Monday, the dreaded day of ejection, found the family at the rectory early astir, for much remained to be done before taking their leave of that pleasant and happy home. The few plain articles of furniture which would be needed in the humble dwelling henceforth to be theirs, were to be selected, and the remainder disposed of to the best advantage among their neighbors and friends. Almost every one was anxious to possess some memorial of a family so justly



beloved, and the money thus raised was all on which they were to depend for present subsistence. It was the more needful, since the ejected ministers were purposely thrust out of their parishes just before the annual payment of the tithes, which fell due in September, thus depriving them of a year's income which was justly their own.

When Annie Leigh had made every arrangement in her power to lighten the burdens of her parents, she stole away for a few hours to visit her poor and aged pensioners, who for years had been accustomed to watch for her coming, as the only ray of sunshine that gilded their darkened pathway. As she passed through the orchard and garden, and looked for the last time on the trees under whose branches she had played in childhood, the flowers she had loved to tend, and which in her imagination

“Never would in other climate grow,”

the bitter contrast between the past and present overcame her, and for the first time in many days she gave way to a natural burst of sorrow. Never had the home of her childhood seemed so dear and beautiful as now, when she must leave it for ever. Never had “love’s young dream” shone with such enchanting radiance as now, when it was dissolving in the sober light of reality. It was a dangerous moment for that young and untried heart, with such memories pressing upon it.

Just then, however, a little girl belonging to a school established by Mrs. Leigh and her daughter came up with an apron full of flowers, which she emptied into the lap of the young girl, saying, “They’re all for you, dear Miss Annie; we have been picking them this morning, because we love you so; and granny

says she hopes you'll come and see her before you go. But why do you go away? it's such a pretty place here, and nobody can ever love you as we do, I'm sure; please stay, dear Miss Annie."

The strained chords of feeling gave way under this infantile touch; but though tears fell in torrents, they were less bitter, and after a few moments she said, taking the hand of the child as she rose to leave the grove,

"You are very kind, my child, to think of your teacher, and to gather all these beautiful flowers for me. I should love to stay with you all, but God appoints our lot, and he has made it my duty to go with my parents and sister to a new home. But always remember, Mary, that if you love the Bible and obey your teachers and try to serve the Saviour, you will see us all again, where no wicked men will have power to sep-

arate us. Will you promise me to try?"

"I would do any thing in the world to live with you always," replied the child; "but there 'll be nobody to teach me how to be good when you are gone, and I'm afraid I shall forget what you have said, so that I never shall see you any more."

That was a sad morning for Annie, as she visited for the last time the cottages of her humble friends, and many a withered cheek was wet with bitter tears, and many an aged knee bent in fervent supplication for the lovely young creature whose active and judicious kindness had so often caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

On leaving the cottages, the young girl returned home by a circuitous route, which led her past the Grange, a large old-fashioned farm-house belonging to a

wealthy farmer, one of the few who, since the Restoration, had shown themselves bitter enemies of the good rector of Ilverton. Mr. Goodwin was in the field overlooking his workmen; but when he saw the graceful form of Annie Leigh gliding along, he came forward hastily, saying as he approached her,

“I am a plain man, Miss Leigh, and may as well say to you, that I never thought much of your father’s preaching and praying, and I have had my doubts whether he really believed in them himself. Every man has his trade or business, and as his was religion, it was only natural that he should drive it as fast and as far as he could. Mind, I’m only telling you what I have thought,” as he saw the indignant color rush to the cheek and brow of Annie; “but I think so no longer. Yesterday I learnt another lesson, and I’m not likely to forget it. When a



man gives up such a living as Ilverton, and takes poverty and day-labor instead of ease and plenty, all because he wont forsake or deny his principles, then it's time to begin to think there's something in religion more than I've got, or am likely to have.

“But I didn't stop you to talk about what I believe or don't believe; it isn't much matter which. I understand from my womankind, that you have some sort of musical instrument at your house, on which folks learn to play, and that it is for sale. My daughter must be sent away from home, I suppose, to learn all sorts of useless things, and look down on her old father and mother, and when she comes back, she'll want something to show off upon, and I thought perhaps you'd like to part with that instrument.”

“You are very kind,” replied Annie; “we shall have to part with the harpsi-





chord, which is very dear to us from having been my mother's, but we feared there would be no one about here who would wish to purchase so expensive an article."

"That's just what I supposed," returned the purse-proud farmer; "it isn't every one who can afford to spend such a sum for a useless thing like that, but I've worked hard for my money, and have a right to spend it to suit myself. I want to say to you, that if ever you should choose to have the instrument back again, you shall have it at the same price that I give; and I take it that's fair."

"My parents will accept your kind offer very gratefully I am certain," said Annie, "and I thank you for the assistance given us in this time of need."

With the money thus raised, Mr. Leigh was enabled to settle the few outstanding bills which were to run until his tithes



became due, at Michaelmas, but which there now seemed no way to meet, until provided for in this manner by a kind Providence.

A market cart furnished by a friend, was to take the family, together with their humble plenishing, to the new house, which none of them had yet seen. As they passed through the long lines of friends and neighbors who had assembled to bid them farewell, every hat was raised, and many a heartfelt supplication ascended to God, for blessings on the beloved exiles. The pastor and his family were outwardly calm, though the pallid cheek and glistening eye told a tale of sorrow too deep for utterance.

“The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide,  
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.”



## CHAPTER V.

## THE COTTAGE AMONG THE HILLS.

By the kindness of a few friends, a cottage had been obtained for the exiled minister and his family, situated among the hills, at the distance of eight or ten miles from Ilverton. It had been occupied by a shepherd on the estate of Sir Richard Brent, who had emigrated to America a year or two before, leaving the house vacant, as the situation was so lonely that few cared to occupy it.

The house was larger and more commodious than most of the hovels of the poor at that period; boasting two apartments on the ground floor, one comparatively large, into which the outer door opened, and which was to constitute the kitchen and family sitting-room; the oth-

er, opening from this, smaller, and lighted by one small window set with diamond shaped panes of glass, which was appropriated to the use of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh. These, with a little chamber for Annie and Rose, and an open loft for Margery, completed the inventory of apartments.

When, after a fatiguing journey over a rough and hilly road, the family reached the house which was henceforth to be their home, and entered the desolate rooms, looking as though no exercise of skill or ingenuity could ever make them habitable; Mrs. Leigh became so deadly pale, that she seemed about to fall; but Annie ran to her side, and throwing her arms about her said cheerfully,

“Only see, dear mother, what farmer Goodwin has done for us. He has had the rough walls whitewashed so nicely, and boards laid over the earth floors, and now we shall soon be comfortable, you

will see, dearest mother; only take papa and Rose out to the grove yonder for a little while, and Margery and good dame Green who has come to assist us, will make it look quite like another place."

With difficulty she persuaded Mrs. Leigh to leave all arrangements to her and her two efficient assistants; and having done so, with a heart lightened of half its burdens by the desire to furnish a pleasant surprise for that dear mother, she set about arranging the inner room. Thanks to farmer Goodwin and dame Green, this room was in readiness for the simple furniture.

A piece of worn carpeting nearly covered the rough floor; a white muslin curtain, looped back with a blue ribbon, gave an air of taste and refinement to the small window, and a case of drawers, a chintz-covered sofa, and an old arm-chair, which had been saved by Annie from the gen-

eral wreck, made the room look more like home than at first deemed possible ; and when the neat tent-bed with its covering of pure white was in its place, all was ready for the occupants, and with light step Annie left the house to find and bring them back.

She had been so engrossed with care for others when they first reached the cottage, that its surroundings were almost unnoticed. Now, however, she saw with gladness that in leaving Ilverton they had not left all the beauties of nature behind them. Here were wood-crowned hills all around, and forests of tall, stately trees, and green grass looking as if levelled by the roller ; and to crown all, a little rippling brook ran just below the house, betraying its course by the fringe of willows and alders which lined its brink.

“How beautiful!” exclaimed Annie,

as she gazed upon the scene. "Since God is here also speaking through his works, we cannot be wholly unhappy or alone."

She found her parents and sister on a turf seat by the little brook, and so engrossed in thought, that she stood before them ere they were aware of her approach. If there was deep sorrow visible in those dear faces, there was also holy resignation depicted there; and as the young girl described the beauties of the surrounding scenery with the fervor of an enthusiast, a smile, faint and wintry indeed, but still a smile, was on the lip of Mrs. Leigh as she said,

"You must have looked on nature through some beautifying medium, my dear child, for we saw nothing of all this as we came hither."

"But you shall see it as you go back, my mother, and confess that I am right,



for I shall take you home by a different route, and one that you would hardly find yourself."

The prospect was seen and admired by all the little party, but on reaching the house, as Mrs. Leigh was ushered into the little room so changed by the hand of affection, she burst into tears, and fondly clasping her daughter in her arms, exclaimed,

"Forgive me, my Father, for deeming myself poor while possessing such a treasure in this good and dutiful child. Henceforth let me never repine while my husband and children are left to me."

The next morning, Annie and her faithful helper were up with the light, arranging the few plain articles of furniture in the common room, which, under the skilful fingers of the young girl, soon wore an aspect of neatness and even of comfort; and while old Margery pre-

pared the simple breakfast, Annie ran down to the brook for a plate of water-cresses with which to garnish the neatly spread table. When all was in readiness, and little Rose had made her appearance looking like a flower sparkling with morning dew, Annie called her parents, welcoming them with a beaming smile to the morning meal.

The open door, and windows destitute of glass, from which the board shutters had been thrown back, gave the room an air of pleasantness from the verdure which everywhere surrounded it; and within, perfect neatness and order stripped poverty of its most revolting features.

“The Lord in heaven bless thee, my child,” said the pastor, laying his hand fondly on the head of his daughter, “even as thou art made a daily and hourly blessing to us. Truly He who hath cast us down from our former estate, hath gra-

ciously tempered the stroke by leaving to us all that was most valuable of our former possessions—these precious children.”

It was impossible that the family of the rector should not feel, and that severely, the great change in their condition, as the thousand discomforts of their humble abode pressed heavily upon them from day to day ; but God was with them in the furnace, and the offering which ascended from the domestic altar was a tribute of praise and thanksgiving, that where every blessing was forfeited, so many had still been spared. Nor was this an evanescent feeling.

“Still day by day the Lord those pilgrims led,  
And gave them daily grace like daily bread,”

while he enabled them to take joyfully the evils of this present life, in the prospect of a better and more enduring inheritance beyond the grave.

Several weeks passed, and no employ-

ment had yet been found by Mr. Leigh, whose scanty funds were rapidly diminishing, when one day a pony-chaise drove up the hill, from which a lady alighted, and meeting Rose near the door, was conducted by the child into the room where Mrs. Leigh and Annie were engaged in some domestic avocation. The visitor was of middle age, singularly attired in a costume partaking largely of the masculine, and announced herself as Miss Harvey of Briar Lodge, an estate some miles distant.

“I have recently lost my bailiff,” she said, “who for years has had charge of my rents and lands, and on application to my solicitor, who resides in Ilverton, was recommended to Mr. Leigh as a suitable person to take his place. Can I see the man?”

A pang almost like that of death thrilled through the heart of Mrs. Leigh as she

thought of her husband, educated, refined, and intelligent beyond his peers, occupying the station of a menial; but it soon passed as she remembered that this was a part of the appointed trial, and she answered calmly that her husband was absent, but would soon return.

“How is this, my good woman?” inquired the visitor; “one would imagine from your appearance and that of these beautiful girls that I have made a mistake in calling here for the person of whom I am in search. You have not always been in your present station, I am certain. Pardon me if I intrude; I have no wish to annoy you with inquiries which, after all, do not affect my errand. I only wish to know if your husband would take the vacant situation on my estate.”

“My husband is here to answer for himself,” was the reply, as Mr. Leigh



entered the room, and advancing towards Miss Harvey, saluted her with the quiet dignity peculiarly his own.

“I have certainly been misinformed,” she said hastily, and in some confusion; “you cannot be the person of whom I was in search.”

“I am the same, undoubtedly, madam, since circumstances have made it necessary for me to earn my daily bread by daily toil; and I am willing to perform any honest labor for which a fair requital may be made.”

An arrangement was soon entered into between the parties, Mr. Leigh only stipulating that his family should remain where they were, as from the general appearance of his employer, he had some doubts of the permanence of his engagement. For some time all went on pleasantly. Mr. Leigh's salary was sufficient to supply his family with the necessaries and

some of the comforts of life, and there were opportunities of doing good of which he gladly availed himself on every possible occasion. The former bailiff had been a sordid, grasping man, of whom the tenants stood in constant fear, and they soon learned to love the new steward in proportion to the dislike and dread felt for his predecessor.

One circumstance alone was a constant source of discomfort to Mrs. Leigh, who shrank with morbid sensitiveness from the approach of strangers. Miss Harvey had admired Annie and Rose so much on her first visit, that she soon repeated it; and as every interview only deepened the impression, she went often to the cottage, never imagining that such condescension could give any thing but pleasure to the secluded family of her bailiff. Every thing she saw and heard there stimulated her desire to know more

of individuals so strangely out of place in that desolate abode. Though she felt kindly, her questions and allusions were galling in the extreme, both to Annie and her mother.

The artless Rose, charmed with the good lady who brought her so many pretty things, prattled to her of their old home, until checked by a look from her mother and sister; but little could be learned from such a child of the past history of the family, and the others were invariably silent on the subject, so that the curiosity of Miss Harvey was destined to remain ungratified.

Winter was passing away, and Mr. Leigh had begun to find his new duties more tolerable than at first, when one Saturday evening, as he was about to leave for home, he was summoned to the Lodge, where Miss Harvey awaited him in the library.

“I have sent for you,” she said, motioning him to a seat beside the table, which was covered with papers, “to give some directions about a matter of business which requires immediate attention. I cannot give my time to it to-night, as I am otherwise engaged, but to-morrow is a day of leisure, and if you come early to the Lodge, I will give you directions, so that in a few hours you can do all that I desire.”

She spoke rapidly, and with the air of one who neither expected nor would brook refusal; but Mr. Leigh answered firmly, though respectfully,

“My time throughout the six days of the week is at your disposal, madam, and I will gladly remain to-night and write until midnight, if it so please you.”

“Have I not said I am engaged, and cannot attend to it this evening? Why should you prefer staying away from

your family to complying with my reasonable request that you should come to-morrow ?”

“Because, dear madam, to-morrow is not my own day, but belongs to One who has forbidden me, on pain of his displeasure, to do any worldly business on the Sabbath-day.”

“You are then one of that miserable canting sect the Puritans. I have sometimes suspected the fact, but until now have had no proof of it. Am I then to understand that you refuse to comply with my requirement?” and a most ominous frown contracted the harsh features of the lady.

“In aught that concerns myself alone, it is both my wish and duty to comply with your demands, madam; but where duty to God is in question, I may not, without sin, obey the creature rather than the Creator.”



Astonishment at the boldness of one whom she regarded as a menial, almost deprived Miss Harvey of the power of speech ; still there was in the manner of the bailiff a conscious rectitude and dignity which, in spite of her anger, impressed her with a feeling of respect.

“Perhaps you will condescend to tell me,” she said with a sneer, “in what way my proposal interferes with your duty to God, about which you have so much to say. I do not ask you to commit any public breach of the Sabbath, to make scandal among your own sect, only a little private transaction of business, which can harm no one, however tender his conscience may be.”

“Pardon me, madam, if I say that I am not allowed to make any such distinctions in my obedience to the command, ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.’ That commandment is exceeding broad ;

reaching even to the thoughts of the heart, and the God I serve will not accept vain excuses for disobeying his holy will."

"Let him provide for you then," said Miss Harvey, whose anger could no longer be controlled; "for assuredly I shall have no one in my employ who owes allegiance to any authority higher than my own. I will not however treat you as you deserve, by dismissing you instantly, but will give you time for reflection. If you think better of your duty to me, come to-morrow to the Lodge, and this obstinacy shall be forgiven; but if you persevere in your absurd notions of duty, you may consider yourself dismissed from this evening, and I only hope your conscience will give you as good a support as your wages here have done."

So saying, with a haughty gesture she dismissed the discarded bailiff, who could only look silently up to the God he serv-

ed, for help and strength in the darkness that surrounded him.

It was impossible, with the small stipend he received, to lay by any thing in winter, when fuel was high, and all the necessaries of life in proportion; particularly as he had never, like the former steward, added to his wages by illegal exactions from tenants whose leases had expired, or were about to expire.

“No matter,” said the good man to himself, “there are ravens still on the earth, and one of them will be sent to me, rather than that I or mine shall be suffered to want for bread.”

As he reached the house, the unwonted darkness and silence startled him, and on entering the inner room, he found the family hanging in terror and anxiety over the bed where the household pet lay parched with fever; and in her delirium calling upon the mother and sister, of

whose tender cares she was wholly unconscious.

There was evidently great danger, and medical aid must be had immediately; but how were they to obtain it? The nearest physician lived several miles away, and the road even by daylight was rough and intricate; how could a stranger like Mr. Leigh hope to find it in the starless obscurity of night?

But the precious life of the child was at stake, and that thought outweighed all others; so the father was making ready for his cheerless journey, when there was a knock at the door, and on opening it, a young man appeared, bending under the weight of a large basket sent by farmer Goodwin to the family at the cottage. The youth in his rustic language announced himself as Jim Green, the son of their kind old friend dame Green, and when he heard of the illness of Rose, express-

ed his readiness to go at once for the physician. Here then was the very messenger required, and with heartfelt thanks, Mr. Leigh sent him for the physician, requesting his immediate attendance.

It was a long sad night to the watchers by the bedside of the unconscious sufferer, who was alternately tossing in fevered delirium, or oppressed by a stupor which seemed destroying the very springs of life. Towards morning the doctor came; a cheerful benevolent looking old man, whose pleasant face seemed to Annie like a harbinger of good tidings. He examined the little patient with great care, and then, though he frankly owned the case to be critical, he spoke with courage and hope of the probable result.

For some days the conflict between life and death so occupied the family, that nothing was said by Mr. Leigh of the sad change in his own prospects; nor was it



until Rose had been pronounced out of danger, that he informed his wife and daughter of his interview with Miss Harvey and its consequences. At any other time, the news would have been afflicting in the extreme to them; but the darling of their hearts was spared, and there was room for no other feelings but those of joy and gratitude.

“You have acted like yourself, my husband,” said the wife, while tears filled the eyes turned fondly upon him, “and we ought to rejoice in the grace given you to be faithful in the one talent, as you have been in regard to the ten. Since God has rescued our precious child from the grave that seemed opening to receive her, it is surely easy to trust him for food and raiment.”

“Never had unworthy sinner such comforters as God hath given me,” replied the husband. “Not once, through

all our protracted trial, have their faith and courage failed. I wonder not that the poet calls woman, God's 'last best gift to man.' With wife and children at my side, methinks I could face a world in arms."

The bill for medical attendance was a source of some anxiety to the pastor's family, for the good doctor had been unremitting in his attentions to his little patient by night and day, and the illness of the child had exhausted their small store of money, so that they had no means of meeting it. When, upon his next visit, the circumstances were made known to Dr. Price, with a feeling of embarrassment and pain known only to those who have been in a similar situation, the kind old man replied with a smile,

"Give yourself no uneasiness about my bill, my friends; this little Rosebud has paid it all as we went along. It is

reward enough to have been the means of saving such a charming child;" adding, as he looked archly at Annie, "besides receiving such eloquent looks of gratitude, that were I a young man, they would long ago have converted my heart to tinder. Seriously, my dear sir, I know a little of your history, and though far from your way of thinking, I respect and honor consistency whenever I am so happy as to find it. I would not take money for professional services, from a man who chooses to adhere to his principles rather than his living, any sooner than I would cry, 'Stand and deliver!' to a traveller on Bagshot Heath."

By this and similar interpositions of Providence, Mr. Leigh and his family were carried through the winter; and early in the spring, as nothing else offered, he accepted the situation of under-shepherd on one of the estates of Sir

Richard Brent, obtained for him through the influence of a former parishioner.

In that humble employment, tending his flock on the upland and by the stream, in summer's heat and winter's cold, might be seen the graduate of Oxford, the companion of Pym and Hampden, the friend of Cromwell, and more than all, the eloquent and devoted preacher, on whose lips listening thousands had hung in entranced attention during his former visits to the metropolis. But he was thus enabled to procure food for his dependent family, and when at evening he returned to the humble home secured for them by his daily toil, the fond welcome of his faithful wife, the tender smile of his cherished Annie, and the playful endearments of little Rose, more than repaid him for all the privations and hardships he endured.









## CHAPTER VI.

## AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Two winters had passed away, and a second spring returned, with its unwritten music, its glad sunshine and wealth of flowers; and during all these months Annie Leigh had not once heard from her absent lover. No allusion was ever made in the domestic circle to the brief episode in her existence, which had once seemed to comprise her all of life. His name, that once familiar sound, was never repeated, save in the hidden recesses of her own heart; and but for the shade of sadness resting on her young face when she thought herself unobserved, and the reveries in which she sometimes indulged, he might have been deemed forgotten. But

“The heart that has truly loved never forgets,” unless torn from its hold by the unworthiness of its object; and a nature so tender and true as that of Annie, was not one to recall its affections lightly, even though they had been freely sacrificed on the altar of duty.

One day towards the close of April, old Margery, who had been away for some hours, returned just at evening, and meeting the sisters, began to unfold the budget of news with which she was laden.

“Dame Jones says there’s wonderful doings over yonder at the great house, some kind of a park, I think they call it. The lord and lady have come back from foreign parts, and sights of fine folks with ’em, dressed up like so many peacocks. And, Miss Annie, the nice young man who used to come so often to our house at Ilverton—”

“Oh, my own dear Mr. Clarence,” interrupted Rose, clapping her hands; “what of him, nurse?”

“Nothing bad, only that he has come too, and a lady with him as beautiful as the day, to whom they say he is going to be married.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry he’s going to be married; are n’t you, sister?”

Poor Annie could not reply, but Margery answered,

“Why, little missy, you never say any thing about him, and I thought as how you’d forgotten him like all the rest,” looking reproachfully at Annie; for Clarence had been a special favorite with the old nurse from his first appearance at the rectory.

“I haven’t forgotten him at all,” said Rose indignantly, “only nobody ever wanted me to talk about him, and so I did n’t; but I love him, next to papa and

mamma and sister, best of all, and I always shall. Would n't you, sister?"

It was fortunate for Annie that the gathering shades of evening concealed her features from the keen eyes fastened upon them; but she felt that the power of self-control was fast deserting her, and hurried Rose into the house, where fortunately her attention was attracted in another direction, so that the dreaded subject was not again brought forward.

May-day came, as bright and sunny as even mirth could desire; but the heart of Annie turned away sadly from its beauty, for the contrast between this and the well-remembered May-day two years before, pressed upon her with a weight of sweet and bitter memories that caused every nerve to vibrate with a thrill of anguish. Then she had wandered with a troop of gay maidens, herself as joyous as they, through the glades of the forest



in search of wild flowers; there she had met one now lost to her for ever, who told her his love, and won from her the blushing confession that it was returned, while the hours flew by unheeded in the bliss of that perfect sympathy.

Then her parents were happy in the enjoyment of all that could make life desirable, the guides and benefactors of a people who regarded them with unbounded affection, and the centre of a social circle in which the refinements of polished life were united with the simplicity and sincerity of Christian principle. Now what was their condition? The father, of whom she was justly proud, a servant of servants, whose severe and incessant labor barely sufficed to procure for those dependent upon him the necessities of life; her gentle mother, trained in the lap of ease and affluence, performing daily the most menial offices

without a murmur; and for herself, was not the very light of life quenched for ever in her breast by the blow which had separated her from the chosen of her heart?

As these thoughts came thronging upon her, the young girl groaned aloud in bitterness of spirit; but she had not now to learn where to look for strength in time of need; and as she knelt before the mercy-seat, words of hope and consolation seemed whispered to her by angel visitants, which chased away the gloom, and filled her soul with peace and trust. Long she communed with her own soul and her God; and when at length she joined the dear group below, it was almost with the radiant smile of other days that she returned their greetings.

“Sister,” said little Rose at the close of their frugal repast, “you have promised ever so long to go with me to the

‘Fairies’ Fountain;’ do please go to-day. This is May-day, you know, and we ought to do something nice on May-day.”

“Go, my love,” said the mother in answer to Annie’s look of inquiry. “You can well be spared from household duties, and the walk will be a benefit to you both.”

The two sisters started cheerfully away hand in hand across green meadows and copses gay with May flowers, through “bushy bourne and bosky dell,” to the clear mountain-spring called from time immemorial “the Fairies’ Fountain.” Rose was in raptures with every thing she saw, and Annie felt the quiet beauty of the scene stealing into her heart and filling it with a sweet sense of enjoyment.

They made cups and baskets of the inner bark of the smooth birch, which Rose filled with acorns and delicate bits of green and white moss; after which

they gathered quantities of the beautiful trailing arbutus, to carry home as a memorial of the day's enjoyment. It was with regret that, warned by the lengthening shadows of the flight of time, the sisters prepared to leave a spot which, to one of them at least, had seemed so sweet a refuge from the cares and sorrows of life.

The way home was solitary and unfrequented, and on reaching the lonely cottage of old dame Green, Rose complained of weariness, and begged so earnestly to go in and see the good woman for a few moments, that Annie consented, promising to wait for her in the adjoining lane. She had been alone but a short time, when the sound of approaching footsteps made her heart beat quickly, but at the same time a deep rich voice met her ear, and at the sound of those well-remembered tones, unheard so long, an invol-

untary exclamation escaped her, which rendered the recognition mutual. "Beloved Annie!" "Dear Clarence!" was all that at first they could utter, and in the happy forgetfulness of the moment she suffered herself to be drawn fondly to the heart of her lover, and addressed by every endearing name that affection could suggest. But recollection came too soon, and withdrawing herself from that dear embrace, she murmured,

"It surely cannot be reality; how is it that you are here, dear Clarence?"

"I was making my way over the fields to your home, my Annie, when, thanks to Osric," patting the neck of his splendid Arabian, "who refused to cross the moor, very unreasonably as I then thought, I was compelled to take this direction. What do I not owe him for the unspeakable happiness of this meeting! But you are pale, dearest; your



eyes turn sadly away from mine; you do not share my joy. Is this the welcome you promised me on my return, after so long an absence?"

"Alas, Clarence, there have been many and sad changes since that happy time. A gulf has opened between us which cannot be passed."

"What do your words mean, Annie? They chill my very blood. There is but one thing which can open a gulf between us; and if you have indeed forgotten me, and learned to love another—"

"Do not imagine such a thing, Clarence, even for a moment. My heart has known no change; but have you not heard of what has taken place at Ilverton since your departure?"

"I have heard it all, immediately on my arrival in England, and heard it with grief and indignation unutterable. But surely, my own Annie, these things can

make no difference in our relations to each other. You are, if possible, dearer to me in sorrow than in prosperity; and for all that you have suffered, if love the most faithful and untiring can make amends, my life shall henceforth be devoted to the care of your happiness."

It was hard, with that voice of thrilling tenderness penetrating to the very centre of her being, for the young girl to turn away from the enchanting prospect thus placed before her, and with her own hand to crush out the brightest hope of her existence. But a sense of duty triumphed, and her eye was clear and bright, and her tones, though low, were firm, as she answered,

"I have already listened too long to these dangerous words, which can only torture my heart, but must not shake my resolution. I erred at first in suffering you to speak to me of love, and griev-

ously have I been punished for my fault. Henceforth, dear Clarence, our paths are utterly distinct, for there can be nothing in common between the heir and hope of a noble house and the daughter of a poor shepherd on his father's estate."

"Out on these ridiculous, unjust distinctions. You know, dearest, when you call your noble father a shepherd only, you do him foul wrong. He is to me the peer of princes; and for yourself, the proudest coronet in the land could not give additional lustre to that lovely brow."

"The barrier of rank and station is not the only one existing between us. Our religion, our faith, our hopes for eternity, all differ. Nay, Clarence, I fear you do not worship the same Being I have been taught to revere. Dazzled by the brightness of the vision of happiness which dawned upon me, I forgot

this; but the remembrance has been forced upon me, and I dare not overlook it again. It is your duty to forget me, or to think of me only as a friend whose latest breath will be a prayer for your happiness."

With great difficulty the young man had restrained himself while his companion was speaking; but when she paused, overcome by her emotions, he passionately exclaimed,

"Give you up! learn to forget you, or to think of you only as a friend! Never, Annie; by all my hopes of happiness here and hereafter, never. You are mine by your own confession—by the voice of God speaking within us, which proclaimed our souls one; mine as truly as if the vows which were registered in heaven had been uttered in the presence of assembled thousands. I have learned from my tutor, one of the best of men, to examine

for myself the points on which you and I differed, and the result has been a firm conviction that the Puritans are the only true friends of liberty in this distracted country. I do not profess to feel as you do, my Annie, but I honor and admire your faith and practice; and if ever power and influence are mine, both shall be exerted to the utmost to secure equal toleration for all men. The time will come when I can show your father, by something better than words, how truly I love and reverence him; and in the meantime, give me the legal right to protect you: let me claim this dear hand before the world, and the sorrows that have so oppressed you shall vanish like a dream of the night."

"But your father, your mother," said the agitated girl, "have you forgotten them?"

"It is true, dear Annie, for I will con-



ceal nothing from you, that my mother is proud and haughty, and would probably oppose my wishes, but I think she loves her son, and when she finds that my happiness is at stake, she must yield, or—”

“Say no more, dear Clarence,” interrupted Annie; “such words are worse than useless. Full well do you know that Sir Richard and Lady Brent would never consent to such a union; and I also am assured that with this fact before his eyes, my dear father would oppose it with equal determination. There is indeed no hope for us on earth. God hath severed our destinies, and henceforth we must be strangers, since to meet again would only bring increased misery on both.”

“Cruel, unfeeling girl! you have never truly loved, and seek now to veil your indifference under this wretched subterfuge. You talk of severing ties which are woven about my very heartstrings,

as coolly as if you were planning some scheme of pleasure, and then fancy it meritorious to disregard my agony. Is this the return to which I have looked forward so eagerly; this the reward for which I have waited and watched with unchanging affection?"

"May God forgive you, dear Clarence, as I do, for these cruel and unjust words. If to know that my whole heart is yours, never, never to feel another love—that in this bitter separation, I have suffered, and am still suffering pangs worse than those of death: if this is consolation, take it, for I have nothing else to offer. But do not let our last sad parting be imbittered by words of unkindness. We have enough already to bear, and it needs not this to make the memory of the past sufficiently bitter."

"Forgive me, dearest, for the unmanly violence of my words. I know I am

unworthy of your love, but since such a treasure is mine, think not that I shall tamely relinquish it. Think not this parting is our last. If my life is spared we shall meet again, and under happier auspices. Farewell," he exclaimed, vaulting into the saddle, "only till I can make good my claim in the sight of God and man."

The confidence expressed in these words, in spite of herself, penetrated the heart of the young girl, and awakened there hopes which she thought dead, as with Rose she hastened homeward, after this agitating interview. The story was related to her mother, whose sympathy and counsel had so often cheered her in perplexity; and as she sought her pillow that night, Annie felt that whatever trials might be in store for her, the assurance of the continued affection of Clarence, was a solace which made every burden seem light.

Strange to say, she had not once during her conversation with him, remembered old Margery's story of the preceding evening, deeply as it had then affected her. It was impossible to look on the ingenuous face of the young man, or to meet his clear, truthful eye, and not to feel that treachery or deceit could never find a place in his breast. Without one word on the subject on either side, the report was utterly disproved by every look and tone, and Annie would as soon have doubted her own existence, as the perfect faith of him she loved.

At the close of the interview we have described, Clarence Brent rode rapidly home, and on reaching the house, went at once to the apartment of his mother, whom he found seated before a cheval-glass, under the hands of her tiring woman, who was dressing her hair for the

evening. As her son entered, she bowed coldly, saying,

“Your ride has been somewhat of the longest, my son; but where have you left your party? where is Lady Alicia?”

“In truth, my mother, I know not, as I have not the honor of being her ladyship’s keeper. Possibly Captain Delamere may be better informed on the subject.”

“Is it possible that Clarence Brent can stoop to be jealous, and of a man like Delamere?”

“Not so, my mother, there is no such feeling in my heart. Jealousy and indifference never go together, and the movements of Lady Alicia Somers have no more interest for me than those of her French waiting-maid. But I have ventured to intrude upon you to request the favor of a private interview. Will it please you to dismiss your tiring woman



for a short time, as what I have to say concerns your ear alone?"

"What new whim is this, Clarence? Something very absurd, I dare say; but, Winter, you may retire, only remain within call, as my toilette is not yet made, and the hour of the evening meal approaches."

When they were alone, Clarence seated himself on a tabouret at his mother's side, and taking the jewelled hand, which gave back no answering pressure, he said,

"My mother, I am sure you love your son, good for nothing though he may be: will you not listen as patiently and indulgently as possible to what I have to say?"

Few mothers could have resisted the pleading look and tone of such a son; but Lady Brent was cased in an armor of pride which rendered her invulnerable, so she quietly withdrew her hand

from his clasp and settled her rings as she replied,

“From such an opening, I am confident that something very unreasonable is to follow: but go on; I will hear you with what patience I may.”

“I have told your ladyship that I cannot marry the woman you have selected for my wife, for the good reason that I do not, and never shall, love her; but I have not informed you of the fact that I love another with my whole soul, to whom I am pledged by every tie that can bind an honorable man.”

There certainly was no lack of interest in the manner of Lady Brent as she heard this announcement. She started forward in her chair, the blood rushed to her brow, and her hands were clasped and unclasped in nervous agitation as she exclaimed,

“And you dare to tell me this! You, the hope of an ancient house, the heir of

one of the finest estates in England, who might without vanity aspire to the hand of an earl's daughter; you shamelessly avow your love for some low creature who has practised on your weakness and laughs at your credulity!"

"Mother," said Clarence, as he rose and stood before Lady Brent with flashing eyes, "not even from you will I listen to such words concerning one of the best and purest of God's creatures. You know nothing of whom you speak; and though I would not willingly grieve or disobey you, yet rest assured that my determination is unalterable. I am a man, with a man's strong feelings and purposes, and if there is to be peace between us, even you, my mother, must respect my feelings sufficiently to avoid heaping insult on those dear to me."

This was an exhibition of character which the mother had never before seen

in her son, and for which she was wholly unprepared. She had always ruled her household by the force of an iron will which would brook no opposition; and to meet it now, on such a subject, and from one on whom she had looked as an indolent, careless youth, with little strength of character, this was a trial which for the moment unnerved her; but she soon rallied, and replied in tones which trembled with anger,

“ You do well to threaten a lady, and that lady your mother. Doubtless this is one of the accomplishments you have learned from your new friends. I do not ask or care to know who it is that has caused you to forget your natural ties and obligations; it is enough that you have so carefully concealed your love, to convict you of having chosen unworthily. Nay, do not reply; nothing you can say will alter my resolution on this

subject. You can choose between the parents to whom you owe every thing, and this unknown object of love ; for one or the other must be relinquished. You have thus far in life been suffered to take your own way, because nothing of special interest hung on your decision ; but when your choice concerns the honor and continuance of a noble house, it is time that you should listen to the voice of parental authority, according to the law of God and of the land. I have spoken calmly, because I can make allowance for your youth and inexperience ; but you will find that the decree of the Medes and Persians was not more unalterable than my decision. You can now go, as I have to prepare for the evening."

During this cold and cruel speech, Clarence had been walking the room, but as his mother ceased speaking, he came and stood proudly erect before her, saying,



“ You are my mother, therefore I will not attempt to answer your remarks ; but rest assured of one thing, my heart and hand are my own, sacredly and inalienably my own, to dispose of as I see fit ; and though my action on this subject may be delayed in deference to your prejudices, it will never be relinquished.”

So saying, he left the room ; while his mother, with a bitter smile, murmured,

“ He is a true Brent, self-willed and headstrong, but I greatly mistake if I do not find means to tame him yet.”

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE VISIT TO BROMLEY.

IN the earlier years of her married life, Mrs. Leigh had several times visited an aunt, the sister of her mother, who resided in the north of England, on a handsome estate near Bromley. Messages of affection and more substantial tokens of remembrance, in the form of hampers of game, fruit, etc., and sometimes haunches of venison, came often to the rectory from the childless widow ; but since leaving Ilverton, nothing had been heard from her. Mrs. Leigh regretted this the more, as she had few relatives remaining, and the character of Mrs. Graves rendered her an object of esteem and affection to all who were favored with her friendship.

Left a widow while still comparatively young, she took upon herself the sole management of her property, and by her industry, energy, and economy, had greatly enlarged and improved it, thus adding to her means of doing good, of which she availed herself to the utmost extent. Her large and well-ordered house was a home for the poor and needy, and many a Non-conformist pastor had reason to bless the Lord for such a place of refuge in the dark days that followed black Bartholomew. She had lost sight of the family at Ilverton for some months after Mr. Leigh's ejection, for in those days cheap mails were unknown, and news travelled but slowly over the realm, until, through a casual meeting with a mutual friend, she heard the story of their constancy and suffering. Her heart was deeply moved, and a letter was sent by her at once, enclosing a sum of money

for their immediate use, and containing a request that Annie might be permitted to visit Bromley, and remain as long as she could be spared from home.

“I am growing old,” the letter said, “and need the company of the young to keep my heart from becoming cold and withered. From what I hear, your child is good and dutiful, and has the fear of God before her eyes. She is therefore just what I want. My husband’s property is strictly entailed on his own family, but I have a sufficiency of this world’s goods for my own needs and those of my friends, and your Annie shall be unto me what a daughter would have been, had it pleased the Lord to give me such a treasure. A good and worthy man by the name of Kelso, who with his wife is coming to superintend the dairy upon my farm, will take charge of the child and bring her to me safely.”

This letter was read by the pastor and his wife with mingled emotions of pleasure and pain. To part with their beloved Annie for months was a trial of no ordinary magnitude, when so few sources of pleasure remained to them; but there were reasons which rendered the step very desirable under present circumstances.

It would separate her from Clarence Brent, whose residence in the vicinity was a constant source of suffering, though it could not shake her resolution, or tempt her to swerve from the path of duty. By Annie herself the visit would have been anticipated with delight, but for the thought of leaving her parents to bear alone the trials and privations of their daily lot. This objection was speedily set aside by parental love, and the journey once decided upon, the necessary arrangements were soon made; and in



company with a kind friend she left home for the nearest market-town, where she was to join Mr. and Mrs. Kelso.

They were elderly, respectable people, members of an Independent church at Islington, and Annie felt certain, in placing herself under their protection, that she should be kindly cared for on the way. The party journeyed in the mail-coach, and several days were spent upon the road, so that when they reached Bromley, Annie, who was unaccustomed to travel, was nearly worn out with fatigue and want of sleep.

This was all forgotten, however, when she first caught sight, through a stately avenue of trees, of the ancient looking building which for the present was to be her home. The gravel walks and velvet turf about the premises were in perfect order, and some attempts at ornament were visible in the borders, gay with

phlox, lupines, marigolds, and lychnis, among which not a weed dared intrude.

As Annie entered the wide hall extending through the house, she was met by a bright, cheerful looking old lady, with a face full of kindness, who saluted her affectionately, bidding her welcome to Bromley, and then ushered her into the family sitting-room, at the same time calling for Hannah to come and take charge of the stranger.

Hannah was a stout Welsh woman, with red hair cropped quite closely; a freckled face on which good sense and strong character were legibly stamped; and an odd mixture of rudeness and respect in her manner, the first resulting from neglect in childhood, the other from real kindness of heart. She was the executive officer of the household; prompt and resolute in action, carrying out to the letter, all the plans of her mistress,

whose love of peace led her to shrink from the consequences of insisting upon them in her own person.

When this woman entered the room, she stood for some moments gazing at the new-comer, as if deciding upon her merits, then nodding her head significantly, she said to Mrs. Graves in an audible whisper, "She'll do, I reckon!" and then requested Annie, who could hardly control her features, to follow her up stairs. She was taken to a large and pleasant chamber overlooking the orchard, with wall paper of light blue, and furniture of the same color. The room looked so cool and neat, so much like the quiet resting-place she needed, that the weary traveler uttered an exclamation of delight as she entered it, to which Hannah replied with a grim smile,

"Yes, I knew you'd like it. I got the yellow room ready for you before you

came, but as soon as I set eyes on you, I says to myself, she shall have the blue room, for the best is n't too good for such as her."

"I thank you for your good opinion, but any room would satisfy me, and I should be sorry not to occupy the one chosen by my aunt for me."

"Lackaday, child, your aunt do n't know nor care any more than a baby what room you have, or whether you have one or a dozen. She says to me, 'Hannah, I depend on you to make my niece comfortable,' and that's just what I'm going to do; so you need n't trouble your pretty head about it any way. 'Tis not often we have any thing in these old walls worth looking at; and when we have, I shall take good care of it, I promise you."

Mrs. Graves was a woman of sense and penetration, and she soon saw that her

young guest was suffering from weariness both of mind and body, the consequence of reaction from the continual tension of thought and feeling to which for months she had been subjected. The first requisite clearly was rest, the second, change, and the kind old lady resolved she should enjoy both to the utmost extent. Annie would gladly have made herself useful at once, but to her surprise, when the pressure of care was removed, she found herself so languid, that exertion seemed impossible, and she was compelled to allow Mrs. Graves and Hannah to pet and wait upon her, from mere inability to resist their kindness.

It was not long, under such a regimen, before health and strength came back again; and then, on a Welsh pony provided by her aunt for the purpose, she took long rides over the hills and among the dales, often, with her Bible and a bas-



ket of delicacies, visiting the sick and aged, who were accustomed to watch for the coming of the brown pony and its fair rider, as the most important event of the week to them.

Annie had been at Bromley three weeks before she was able to attend the parish church, and to her frequent inquiries concerning the incumbent of the living, her aunt had never made any definite reply. She only knew that he was one of the few who were induced to subscribe, and thus retained his place; and was surprised to see, instead of the elderly rector whom she had pictured to herself, a young man ascending the pulpit stairs, who looked almost boyish, from the profusion of light hair falling about his face, which he wore long, according to the court fashion of the age. His manner was solemn, and the sermon unexceptionable in matter, and yet Annie was sensible of a deficiency

somewhere, which she could not understand.

On returning home, she spoke of this impression to her aunt, who answered with a sigh,

“Mr. Prescott was one of the clergymen who by conformity was enabled to preserve his living. His mother and a maiden sister live with him at the rectory, and would have been turned homeless upon the world by his non-conformity. Doubtless he felt that he was acting rightly, and I would not judge him harshly, though from the fact that he was a pupil of the good Dr. Bates, I expected a different course from him. To his own Master he must stand or fall, and I would not even in thought condemn him.”

“No indeed,” said Hannah afterwards, “my mistress is too soft-hearted to condemn any thing that breathes; but I’m

not one of the tender-hearted kind, and I'd rather be Mr. Grant with his old coat and empty stomach, than our Mr. Prescott with lands and living."

Annie's thoughts were with her own dear father as she answered,

"I feel about it as you do, Hannah, and yet there may be circumstances of which none but God can judge; and in this case, who can tell what temptations were brought to bear upon him."

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing to have charity, but all the charity in the world, would n't make me believe that the chokecherries on that tree are as good as the sweet oxhearts in the orchard yonder, or that the tree is as good, only something happened to make it bear the wrong kind of fruit."

A few days after this conversation, Annie met the young clergyman at the bedside of a sick woman whom she visit-

ed weekly ; and from that time she encountered him so frequently in her rides and walks, that it was impossible to believe the meetings casual on his part. He even came to the farm-house, where he had never before visited, well knowing that by both mistress and maid, his course was regarded with disapprobation.

The poor people wondered at the change that had come over their minister, when they found him visiting the sick and aged so much more frequently than formerly ; while Annie, fearing she knew not what, confined herself to the house, or changed her hours for riding and walking, in the hope of avoiding him.

One afternoon when she had gone out for her aunt, being overtaken by a shower, she took refuge in a cottage near by ; and finding the good woman out, was amusing herself with the children, when

Mr. Prescott came in, like herself seeking shelter from the storm. Annie would gladly have left the house, but the rain was falling in torrents, and she was obliged to wait until the boy whom she had sent to the farm-house, could return with an umbrella and pattens, to enable her to reach home. She rose and walked to the little casement, looking out for a few moments, then resuming her seat, busied herself with the children; but Mr. Prescott was resolved not to lose so favorable an opportunity, and sending the children to their play in the corner of the room, said hastily,

“Miss Leigh, may I beg the favor of saying a few words to you on a subject which to me is of great importance? It may be vanity in me to suppose myself in any way the object of thought to one like yourself; and yet I fear that, like others, you may have judged hardly of



the course I have pursued in reference to conformity.”

Annie was inexpressibly relieved at the turn the conversation had taken, and replied gently,

“Indeed, sir, I have felt no disposition to judge or condemn you. Each one must answer for himself at a higher tribunal than that of man; and if your own conscience acquits you, who am I that I should presume to sit in judgment on a fellow-creature?”

While she was speaking, the countenance of the young minister was pale and red by turns, and as she closed, he said in a hurried voice,

“I do not profess to have the entire acquittal of my conscience. There are times when I fear that I have done wrong; but all I can say is, I acted for what I then thought the best for myself and those dependent upon me. Others,

wiser than I, have thought it right to subscribe, and certainly we are commanded to obey the powers that be, which are ordained of God."

"I have neither the wish nor ability to argue this point with you, Mr. Prescott, but you must be aware that the daughter of an ejected pastor can have nothing in common with such sentiments as these. I would rather call myself the daughter of Samuel Leigh the non-conformist, than trace my descent from kings," she said with an energy which made her cheeks glow and her eyes sparkle like diamonds.

Mr. Prescott had risen, and was looking with undisguised admiration on the fair girl while she spoke, and as she ceased, he replied in a tone of deep feeling,

"I reverence and admire your sentiments more than I can express, Miss

Leigh, though they may seem to bear severely on my own course. Believe me, I can appreciate the excellence I may not have the moral power to imitate."

"I have heard my dear father say," was the reply, "that the pastors who have been able to remain with their flocks in this evil time, have a double responsibility resting upon them to declare faithfully the whole counsel of God, since the mouths of so many have been stopped. In this way, even if they have erred in judgment, their mistake may be overruled by Him who can bring good out of evil, and cause even the wrath of man to praise him. But pardon me, sir, I had no intention of seeming to teach you."

"Make no apology, my dear young lady; a higher voice than that of man has spoken to me through you; and whatever the result may be, I thank

you for the Christian faithfulness which prompted your words. If they do not make me a better minister than I have been, my guilt will be great. May I hope for permission to call upon you at the house of your aunt?"

Annie was troubled, and knew not what to say, but she murmured something about her aunt's hospitality to all; and then, as the rain was over, bade him good-evening and returned home, feeling that if the rector of Bromley had judged differently from those she loved best in the matter of conformity, he had erred, if at all, rather from lack of moral courage, than from the want of religious principle.

Only a few days had elapsed ere Mr. Prescott came to the farm-house, and his visits were repeated until Annie could no longer be blind to the fact, that her presence constituted the attraction which

drew him hither. The knowledge was very unwelcome, and in spite of herself her manner became so cold and constrained, that the young man resolved to bring matters to an issue. He accordingly availed himself of the first opportunity offered by the absence of Mrs. Graves from the room, on one of his visits, to make known his feelings and wishes; saying in conclusion,

“I have waited from day to day because of my deep conviction of unworthiness to possess such a treasure, but I can wait no longer. I must know my fate from your own lips. If you can return my affection, I shall be the happiest of men; if not, the consolation will at least be mine, that I have loved the best and noblest of women.”

Deeply moved by his evident sincerity, Annie kindly but decidedly declined his proposals, feeling keenly the pain she



was compelled to inflict, for she had none of that contemptible vanity which delights in conquest for its own sake, and would number its victims by hecatombs, rather than doubt its own power to charm.

From that time, during her stay at Bromley, Annie saw the rector only in the pulpit; but it was remarked by all who heard him, that his ministrations there were more spiritual, and his attention to the poor and needy among the people of his charge more constant than ever before. Mrs. Graves rejoiced in the change, and felt that the brief acquaintance, which had terminated so painfully, might in the end prove a blessing both to pastor and people.

The winter passed happily and swiftly away, every month bringing a letter from the cottage to the absent one full of love and hope; but no word from Clarence

had ever reached her since her departure from home. It was best, since they were separated hopelessly, that the curtain of oblivion should fall between them. She knew this, and tried to feel it, though the yearnings of heart for some tidings of the beloved one could not always be controlled; but Annie had long since found that, next to prayer, useful occupation of mind and body was the most effectual method of banishing useless regrets and restoring the spirits to a healthful tone. She was therefore always employed—the “busy bee” of the family, as her aunt fondly called her, secretly thinking how dark the old house would seem when deprived of her presence and smiles.

That time, to her surprise and sorrow, was just at hand. Early in April, Mr. Leigh arrived at Bromley, looking like his former self, in clerical attire, and

with an aspect of cheerfulness which he had not worn for years. He had come for his child, and in answer to the wondering inquiries of Mrs. Graves and Annie, related a story of the goodness of God, which must be reserved for another chapter.

In a few days the young girl left Bromley, followed by the prayers and blessings not only of the family at the farmhouse, but of the aged and infirm, at whose humble cottages her visits had been welcomed with tears of thankfulness.

“It’s the living truth, mistress,” said Hannah, wiping her eyes with her apron, “that I never thought to care for mortal creature as I do for that blessed child. It’s my belief that she hasn’t got as much human natur about her as other folks have, for she always thinks of everybody before herself.”

“Ah, there is the secret, Hannah,” replied her mistress; “our dear Annie has learned at the feet of the Saviour to live for the good of others; and while she is seeking the happiness of all around her, I make no doubt her own will come to her unsought.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SILVER LINING OF THE CLOUD.

THE toil and exposure to which Mr. Leigh had for many months been subjected, were beginning to manifest their usual effects upon his constitution, which had never been inured to labor or fatigue. His form, once erect and stately, was now slightly bent, his raven locks were thickly sprinkled with grey, and his clear hazel eyes told at times a tale of weariness and depression which touched the heart of his faithful wife far more than all her own privations and sorrows. Not that the ejected pastor had lost faith or courage, or that he regretted his action in the past.

Never for one moment had he faltered in the course he then thought it right to



take, but the stoutest heart has its seasons of discouragement, and Mr. Leigh was only a man, subject to infirmities like others. The sacrifices made for conscience' sake were not the less felt to be sacrifices, because cheerfully offered at the bidding of a moral necessity; and he could not look on his beloved wife in her present condition without a sharp pang. To add to his sorrow, his companion and comforter, who had always a smile and cheering word for him, was away, and he missed her more every day as the vacant seat at the table and by the fire-side spoke eloquently of her absence.

He was returning home one evening more than usually depressed, and inwardly praying for strength from on high, when he was met by Jim Green, the son of his good old friend, who was the bearer of a message from farmer Goodwin, requesting Mr. Leigh to come instantly to

the Grange, as the farmer had been seriously injured by an accident, and was in great danger. The pastor mounted the horse which had been sent for that purpose, and having despatched young Green to inform his wife of the circumstance, went at once to the Grange. He found the farmer suffering greatly, but the broken limb had been set, and his symptoms were more favorable, as it was now hoped that no internal injuries had been sustained. When the surgeon had left, the sick man requested Mr. Leigh to take a chair by his side, and said to him with great earnestness,

“I sent for you because in my soul I believe you are a good man, and heaven knows I have need enough of such about me.”

He groaned as he said this, and Mr. Leigh scarcely knowing what to reply, inquired,

“Is there any thing, my dear sir, which I can do to relieve your distress? I am here for that purpose, and would gladly render any assistance in my power.”

“You see me on this bed a poor bruised and maimed carcass, but my worst pains are not those of the body. I have been troubled with strange feelings for months past, when I have thought of you leading the life of a dog, in heat and cold, sunshine and storm, exposed to all weathers, while your wife and family—and such a family—were sheltered in a hovel; and all for what? Just because you would stand by your belief, and could n’t say that white was black and black white, to please the great folks; for that’s what it amounts to, in my thinking. Well, says I to myself, if that’s religion, I haven’t got it, and there aren’t many that I know who have. Somehow it

troubled me more and more, though I tried hard to think 't was no business of mine any way ; so I got out the big family Bible that I always kept laid up in a chest of drawers, but little comfort could I find in that. Now I am thrown by here like a useless piece of lumber, and I want to know of you if there's any hope for an old sinner like me?"

While the farmer was speaking, the head of the pastor was bowed in devout thanksgiving to God ; and in answer to the closing inquiry, he told him of the sufferings and death of Christ, of the way of salvation through faith in his name, and the necessity of repentance and regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit ; to all which the sick man listened as for his life. Tears of penitence were in his eyes all unused to weeping, and a newly awakened soul, which had slept for many years, was looking through

those windows with terror, anxiety, and hope blended in one expression.

After prayer, Mr. Leigh took his leave, promising to return as soon as possible, and on his way homeward his heart was full of joy and gratitude.

“Here have I been,” was his soliloquy, “deeming myself forsaken of God, and thrown by as a broken vessel in which he had no pleasure, and lo, in the midst of my complaining, he has, I trust, given me this precious soul for my hire. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

For some weeks the pastor visited the Grange nearly every evening, and was always received with eager joy by the farmer, whose injuries, though not fatal, were of such a character as to render him an invalid for years, if not for life.

“I am a poor helpless lamiter,” he once said to Mr. Leigh, “and shall never



be of use to anybody again; but in all my years of health and prosperity, I never had one feeling of gratitude to God who gave me all; and now, when my friends look on me as an object of pity only, I feel like praising and thanking him all the time for his goodness: what does this mean?"

"I trust it means, my friend, that whereas you was once blind, you now see; that your heart of stone has become a heart of flesh; and that instead of an enemy and an alien, you have been made a child of God and an heir of heaven. Is not this sufficient cause for gratitude and joy?"

"One thing lies heavy on my heart," said the farmer, "above all my other sins, though they are black enough: it is my most unworthy feelings of dislike and hostility towards you, dear sir, and your brethren, the excellent of the earth

as I now know them to be, who would not perjure themselves, and were cast out from their homes in consequence. It was only because their conduct condemned me, who cared nothing for my soul, and to save my property would have sworn allegiance to the Pope himself. I want humbly to ask your pardon, and through you that of your brethren, for my wickedness. I trust God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven me; but I must have your forgiveness too."

The change in farmer Goodwin was so great that his family saw it with astonishment and distrust. At first they feared that his mind was diseased; and when, on his first leaving his room, the house and farm servants were called together, and the farmer taking his neglected Bible, told them what God had done for his soul, and announced his purpose of attending family worship morning and

evening, his wife and daughter felt certain that the injuries he had received were affecting his brain, and mourned over him accordingly. But when they saw him uniformly kind and cheerful amid all his sufferings, bearing patiently trials of temper that would formerly have called forth a whirlwind of indignation, they were obliged to confess that he was changed greatly for the better, whatever the cause might be.

In the warmth of his feelings, the kind farmer would gladly have taken Mr. Leigh and his family home to the Grange; and when this offer was firmly though gratefully refused, he besought the pastor to resign his present servile employment, and take the situation of bailiff at the farm, which, in the disabled condition of the master, would become an office of responsibility and profit. But this offer also was declined with many thanks,

since there were not wanting those who would have accused the pastor of seeking his own emolument in making a convert of the wealthy farmer, if his condition were to be improved by the change. But many a liberal gift, secretly bestowed, testified the enduring gratitude of Mr. Goodwin, while it gave timely assistance to a worthy and suffering family.

During the year spent by Annie at Bromley, Clarence Brent had visited the cottage but once, having left the country soon after her departure, for Germany, where the year was spent by him in study under the supervision of Mr. Watson, his tutor and friend. No word had passed between Lady Brent and her son since the conversation we have recorded, on the subject then brought forward, but each felt that the purpose of the other was unchanged, and by mutual consent it was carefully avoided.

Sir Richard and his wife spent a part of the summer on the Continent with their son, and the remainder at London and Eversden, only returning to Winston in time for the Christmas festivities, which were to be gaily kept by a large party of guests in honor of the return of the young heir. But before the day arrived, Clarence had signified his intention of remaining at Gottingen through another winter, and his mother was suffering from the rapid development of a fatal disease; so the invitations were recalled, and silence and gloom reigned at the Park, instead of the anticipated gayety and splendor. The most eminent physicians from London were summoned to attend her; and after repeated consultations her ladyship was informed that in order to preserve, or even to prolong her life, a painful and dangerous operation was necessary. From such an oper-



ation they hoped and expected the most favorable results, though they frankly informed her that it might prove almost instantly fatal.

It was a fearful alternative for the proud and worldly woman, who had never thought of death in connection with herself, and whose plans for the future were all arranged without reference to the possibility of failure. She hesitated for a few moments only, and then said to her physician,

“Obtain the very best surgical aid from London without regard to expense, and then do for me all you can. I will take the chance.”

It was the wish of Sir Richard to send for their son before the day of trial; but to this the mother refused her consent. “I will not become an object of dread and terror to my son,” she said, in answer to the entreaties of her husband: “if

I get through it happily, there will be time enough for rejoicing; if not, he will be spared some pain: in either case he is better away."

The day at length arrived; the operation was performed with skill, and it was at first hoped, with success; but after a few hours symptoms of a fatal character made their appearance, and the surgeons in attendance announced to Sir Richard that their worst apprehensions were about to be realized. The poor man was almost beside himself with anxiety and terror: he assured the family physician that it was impossible for him to inform Lady Brent of her danger, and entreated him to take the solemn duty upon himself, to which he reluctantly consented.

It was a scene never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. The horror with which the sufferer heard the fatal sentence, so sudden and unexpected, for she

had supposed the danger over, and the bitterness of death passed; her frantic entreaties for more medical aid, that at least she might live a little longer, and her agony when told that all was in vain, made the scene so terrible that few could remain in the apartment.

When from mere exhaustion she had become more calm, she entreated that a clergyman might be instantly summoned to attend her. A messenger was sent in haste for the incumbent of the parish, who returned with the intelligence that his reverence was out with the hounds on a hunt; and the curate, to whom he was next sent, had accompanied his patron.

“Is there then no one to pray with me?” exclaimed the dying woman in accents of despair; “must I depart without one cry for mercy?”

“May it please your honor,” said an old serving man to Sir Richard, who knew

not what to do, "I have heard John Locke the tinker say, that on your honor's estate at Boughton, there is a shepherd who prays better than even his reverence himself."

"Let him be instantly summoned," was the brief reply; and a man and horse were speedily on their way to the dwelling of Mr. Leigh, who lost no time in obeying the summons. He was ushered into the gorgeous apartment in which the mistress of the mansion lay dying, clad in his usual coarse garb, and kneeling by the bedside offered up a prayer so applicable to the circumstances of the case, so full of pathos and devotion, that the silence of death reigned throughout the room, and all present were overpowered with emotion. It was a frail mortal wrestling by faith with the King of kings, pleading for the life of an immortal soul with a fervor that could not be denied.

Even the groans of the dying woman were hushed, and as he rose from his knees, she said to him faintly,

“I thank you, whoever you are, for you mean kindly, but it is too late. I cannot, in the brief space allowed me, unlearn the belief and feelings of a whole life; but you are evidently sincere, and if we had met earlier, all might now have been different with me.”

Her voice failed; and as the attendant came to the bedside with a stimulant, Mr. Leigh left the room with Sir Richard, who, on reaching another apartment, thus addressed him :

“Shepherd, I am well assured from your language and appearance, that you are far other than you seem. Tell me, who and what are you?”

“I am a poor man,” was the meek reply, “employed on your honor’s estate at Boughton, in tending sheep.”



“Tending sheep! a man who looks and speaks as you do, keeping sheep for me! What was your former occupation? for well I am assured you have not always been in the one of which you speak. Tell me what you were formerly.”

A bright glow flitted across the bronzed cheek of the good man, but the emotion of pride was soon conquered, and he answered calmly,

“For more than twenty years I was an under-shepherd of the Lord Jesus Christ, and employed in feeding the flock which he purchased with his blood.”

“And your name?”

“Is Samuel Leigh.”

“What, the ejected minister of Ilverton? I have heard of you, Mr. Leigh, through my son, and ought at once to have known you through the description he has given. I little thought the man so revered by him as well as others, was

a common laborer on my estate. This must no longer be. I cannot, under present circumstances, attend to the matter, but you shall hear from me very soon, and I trust we shall be able to arrange things satisfactorily to all parties."

Clarence Brent was summoned home to attend the funeral of his mother; and after all was over, he accompanied his father to the cottage, and enjoyed his surprise, on meeting Mrs. Leigh and Rose, to find such beings in a situation so humble.

"This is all wrong, my good sir," said the baronet; "your family have no business in this hut, where they are as strangely out of place as you are in the situation of shepherd. Henceforth you shall be employed as my chaplain, with a salary adequate to your support; and we will contrive to gather a flock for you, better suited to your character and at-

tainments than the one you are now tending. Make ready at once to quit your present employment, and assume again the one you have heretofore so worthily filled."

Did not the persecuted Non-conformist feel, as his guests left him, the truth of the Saviour's words, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it?"

In a few days a neat and pleasant cottage near the Park was put in order by Sir Richard and his son, who was a delighted assistant in the plans of his father; and the family of the rector having removed to it, the father lost no time in bringing back his absent daughter to share the common joy.

It seemed like a dream to the happy girl when, on reaching Winston, she drove past the Lodge and through a side avenue of stately trees, and was received by

her mother and sister in their own pleasant home, while many well-remembered articles of furniture, and above all the old harpsichord, occupied their accustomed places in the tasteful apartment.

“You have not yet seen all, dear sister,” said Rose, as she drew her out into the little porch, where stood one whom she hardly thought ever to meet again on earth. The manner of Clarence was tender and respectful, and well calculated to reassure the trembling girl, whose face, spite of her efforts to conceal it, was radiant with delight at this unexpected meeting.

“I am waiting, my own dear Annie,” he found means to say before leaving, “with what patience I can command, for the time when I can claim you for my own in the face of the world; but I will not risk the happiness of the present moment by offending the prejudices of my

father. When he comes to know you, I am certain he will be glad and proud to call you daughter."

The prophecy was speedily fulfilled. Sir Richard was a frequent guest at the cottage, and as he saw from day to day the unpretending loveliness of the maiden, her filial tenderness and care, with all that nameless charm of voice and manner which surrounded her like a garment, his admiration knew no bounds. It was a new revelation of feminine character which he saw at the home of his chaplain, and in proportion to its novelty was its influence on the proud but kind-hearted baronet.

"Clarence," he said one day to his son, "I shall begin to think you are as blind as a mole in regard to your own interest, if you can associate with such a girl as the parson's daughter without losing your heart and trying to win hers in return.



If the young person of whom your poor mother stood in such mortal dread, was half as good and beautiful as Annie Leigh, I should not blame you for remaining true to her, were she as poor as Lazarus."

"My father," replied the young man with a smile, "your advice is excellent, but it comes a little too late. Has it never occurred to you that the fair unknown to whom my faith is pledged and your favorite Annie might be the same?"

"Zounds, boy, what an idiot I have been not to see this before. I might have known you had too much sense to let such a prize slip through your fingers; but why have I been kept in ignorance so long?"

"My father, I feared your prejudices in favor of birth and rank, and have waited, well aware that nothing I could say would reconcile my mother to my alliance with the portionless daughter of an ejected minister."

“And you were right, boy; we should both have been against you and your dear Annie; but I have learned some profitable lessons lately, thanks to my good friends at the cottage, and now you are at full liberty to make yourself happy in your own way.”

Clarence thanked his father with all the eloquence of love and joy, and hastened to impart the good news to Annie and her parents, whose consent could no longer be withheld, since that of Sir Richard had been so freely given.

A message from court summoned the baronet to London during the summer, but as he was confined to the house by gout, his son went in his stead, and was detained by the king for several months, making only flying visits to the Park. The folly, extravagance, and profligacy of the court completed the work of conviction commenced by the influence of

Annie and the teachings of Mr. Watson ; and Clarence adopted, with all the earnestness of his nature, the doctrines of civil and religious liberty advocated by the Non-conformists. His heart indeed was still unchanged, but his wealth and influence were freely given for the promotion of the rights of conscience ; and as the zeal of the party in power had been in some degree satiated by the number of its victims, he was enabled to save many an ejected minister from utter destitution by his bounty, and to bring back hope and comfort to many a darkened household.

The time came at last when he could with honor bid adieu to a court with which he had become thoroughly disgusted, and hasten to the home where love and happiness awaited him.

The festivities of Christmas were celebrated in the princely halls of Winston on a scale of magnificence befitting the

occasion; for at that time a young and lovely bride was brought home to his ancestral halls by its happy heir, who during his experience of life in the metropolis had only learned more fully to appreciate the excellence of his long loved Annie.

In the gilded saloons and tapestried chambers of her new abode, the youthful lady of Winston was like a ray of sunshine gladdening all it touched; and when called on various occasions to mingle with the proud baronage of England, not one among the high-born beauties who graced the court of the second Charles excelled Mistress Annie Brent in loveliness of person, or in those rarer endowments of mind and manner which won all hearts to their unconscious possessor.

But the happiest moments of her life were spent at the cottage, the pleasant residence of her father and his family,

where, surrounded by all she loved, the young wife would seat herself at her father's feet, with his hand resting fondly on her sunny ringlets, and listen to his grateful review of the checkered past, while every member of the endeared circle fervently responded to his closing exclamation :

“Not one good thing in our experience hath failed of all that the Lord hath spoken concerning the sufferers for conscience' sake. The trials of our life have passed away as a tale that is told ; our lot is cast in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage. But let us not forget in prosperity the message borne to our souls by affliction, or lose amid the sweetest melodies of earth the whisper of the still small voice that once said to us in the roaring of the tempest, ‘Arise ye, and depart ; for this is not your rest.’”



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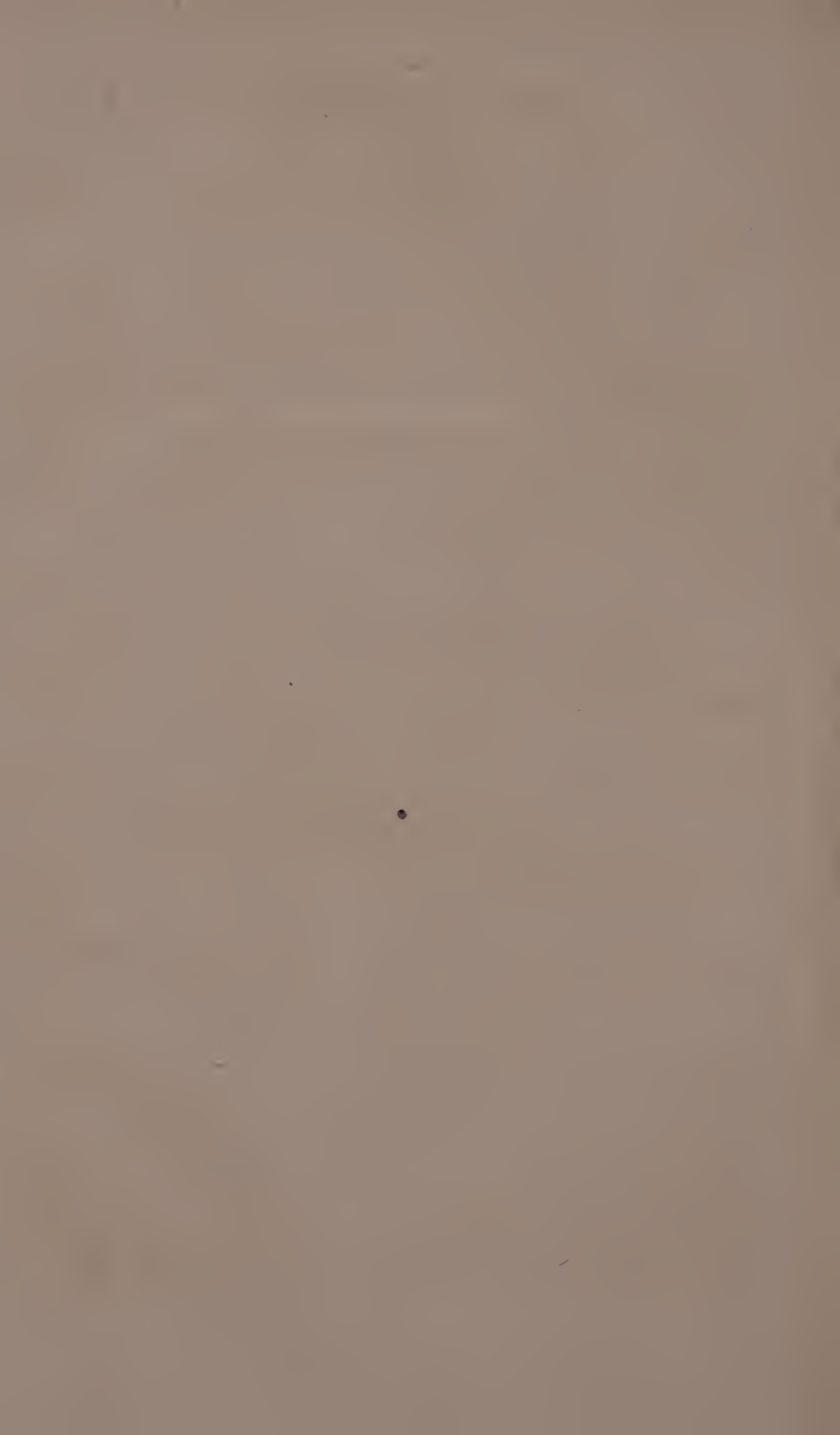
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